

**A LEXICO-PRAGMATIC INTERPRETATION OF GI-GICUGU
EUPHEMISM**

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Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English
Language and Linguistics of Chuka University**

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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Declaration

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

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Mum Ann Wanjiku Kimathi, Late Dad John Peter Magu, and my sister Eunice Gaturi Maguh.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I acknowledge the providence of the Almighty God. I also acknowledge the Chuka University for offering me a space to pursue this degree. My special thanks go to my supervisors Prof Christine Atieno and Dr. Elijah Chege for their support in shaping the course of this work. I give thanks to my family for their unwavering support throughout this journey. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends and course mates whose encouragement, insights, and camaraderie made this academic journey more enriching and bearable.

ABSTRACT

This research argues that language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for expressing attitudes, emotions, and worldviews. It contributes to the field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, with a specific focus on lexico-pragmatic analysis within African languages. The study focused on the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of the Kikuyu language. It examined the lexico-pragmatic interpretation of euphemism, particularly how politeness is linguistically constructed across various social contexts. The main objectives were to analyze the functions of euphemized lexical items in conveying meaning, to identify possible communication barriers arising from their use, and to explore how both positive and negative politeness strategies reflect the social values of the Gĩgĩcũgũ speaking community. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, which focused on understanding the meanings, experiences, and social contexts of language use rather than quantifying data. It aimed to capture the richness of speakers' expressions and attitudes through focus group discussions and recording of natural speeches. The study adopted a descriptive linguistic approach, which systematically described the language used in specific social settings, particularly how euphemisms function in communication within the Gĩgĩcũgũ speaking community. Purposive sampling was used to select native Gĩgĩcũgũ adult speakers from the rural Rung'eto region, ensuring fluency in the dialect and familiarity with cultural norms. The researcher used these speakers to obtain the euphemistic words and expressions used in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. Data was collected through focus group discussions and recording of natural speeches. The primary instrument of data collection was researcher designed guide for capturing euphemistic expressions used in relation to key social domains such as birth, circumcision, marriage, diseases, sex and relationships, church activities, and death. Data analysis was conducted thematically in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, examining how euphemisms serve both communicative and social functions. The study revealed that Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers employ euphemisms to maintain politeness, manage face-threatening acts, and reinforce social cohesion. It also revealed that the use of such expressions at times leads to miscommunication or ambiguity due to generational, social and cultural differences. Ultimately, the study shed light on how euphemism in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect operates as a culturally embedded strategy of meaning-making and politeness.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The term "euphemism" first appeared in Thomas Blount's 1656 book *Glossographia* (Burchfield, 1985) and originates from the Greek word *euphèmos*, derived from *euphèmos*, meaning "of good omen" (from *eu*, 'good', and *phèmi*, 'I say'). Euphemisms involve replacing an offensive or unpleasant term with a milder one, often described as a "veil" or "shroud" over the harsh reality, much like how a shroud hides a dead body (Richard & Schmidt, 2010). The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms (1976) defines it as "the substitution of a mild and pleasant expression for a harsh and blunt one." Leech and Rowson (1995) further explain that euphemisms are used to replace terms deemed disagreeable or objectionable by speakers or their audience.

Euphemism is not merely a lexical substitution, but also a universal and strategic form of verbal behavior (Crespo-Fernández, 2005), serving a pragmatic and often protective function in social discourse (Fairclough, 2008). As Allan and Burridge (2006) note, euphemistic choices reflect both the topic at hand and the social norms of the interaction. More studies have expanded on this view, showing that euphemism is a culturally embedded tool used worldwide to manage sensitive topics such as death, sexuality, illness, and politics. Al-Fattah (2017), for example, explored how euphemism is employed in Arabic and English political discourse to soften controversial messages and reduce confrontation. A more recent study by Wang, Holman, & Goel (2024) used multilingual AI models to identify euphemistic terms in diverse languages, confirming that speakers across cultures tend to avoid direct references to socially delicate subjects. In Turkey, Küçük and Arıkan (2024) demonstrated that euphemisms are deeply linked to religion and tradition, while Sebate and Banda (2021), working with Sesotho sa Leboa, highlighted how euphemisms carry symbolic meaning, especially in contexts like initiation rites or leadership. These studies show that euphemism is more than language softening, it is an active expression of cultural values, social sensitivity, and interpersonal strategy. Understanding its global relevance helps to position this study within a broader linguistic conversation.

In Africa, euphemisms play a crucial role in mitigating the effects of taboo subjects to maintain social harmony and avoid perceived threats (Mwanambuyu, 2011). They are seen as a form of protective magic, reinventing and obscuring harsh realities (Maitja, 2013). Euphemisms vary by culture, reflecting differences in moral standards, religion, social practices, history, and values. The frequency of euphemisms in translation depends on the cultural background of the source language (Mudau, 2024). Euphemisms align with the English figure of speech litotes, which softens harsh realities in social contexts to avoid offending emotionally vulnerable individuals.

Compared to many European languages, many African languages and cultures utilize euphemisms more frequently (Zhao & Dong, 2010). Euphemism usage has a lengthy history dating back many years. Numerous researchers have invested a great deal of time and money in their studies. Given the nature of some topics that are considered too objectionable to discuss in practically all languages, Miller (1999) noted that there is need to find a roundabout, indirect and socially acceptable ways of referring to such concepts. He feels that euphemism cleans up language. For instance, in order to magnify reality, speakers may employ positive euphemism. Usually, the goal is to make one seem more respectable to the recipient. Conversely, negative euphemism distorts or minimizes one's value in the eyes of the addressee, and the speaker will attempt to utilize euphemism in order to maintain their composure. This would encompass, but not be limited to, behaviors like using the expressions such as “going to the gents/ladies” instead of “going to the toilet”, “intercourse” instead of “sex”, “insane” or “mentally ill” instead of “mad” and so on.

Making face-threatening remarks or utilizing forbidden or direct language in public discussions or chats is likely to provoke humiliation and displeasure, which would then lead to a breakdown in communication. Euphemisms play a crucial role in facilitating smooth communication by mitigating the sharp edges of meaning in these statements. Thus, euphemisms are terms that are frequently employed in place of prohibited or objectionable words. They are used in place of offensive, harsh, or depressing words and phrases; euphemisms act as a mask, as noted by Maoncha and Ndambuki (2017). Additionally, they argue that, depending on the situation, speakers typically replace prohibited terms with nicer, less startling ones. Therefore, euphemism is the

replacement of "the original signifier, perceived as being offensive or unpleasant, by another expression as if to conceal it". Euphemisms are so potent language tools that few of us, even those who take great satisfaction in having clear communication skills, could not go a day without using them. Euphemism usage in conversation is a widespread occurrence that is ingrained in Kenyan linguistic systems. (Mudau, 2024) Given that euphemisms are frequently used in everyday speech and are always evolving, new forms replacing older ones, it is important to keep up with their changes.

In Central and Eastern Kenya, euphemism is designed to conceal undesirable notions. Its precise meaning is always ignored when a phrase becomes euphemistic. Thus, terms that are employed to minimize the reality of the situation in which one is speaking to participants in interactive conversation can be regarded to be euphemisms. They make up a common element of language use in interpersonal communication. Euphemisms are usually used in all cultures to discuss topics that individuals find offensive or frightening when spoken in a civilized setting. For instance, euphemisms are employed when describing elements of death, illness, and sex. As a result, euphemisms are employed in dissimulation to politely discuss a forbidden subject while hiding obscenity (Njoroge, 2014).

The Kikuyu people are Kenya's most populous, most aggressive, and most influential ethnic group in terms of economy, society, and politics (Guthrie, 1967; Webb and Kembo-Sure, 2000). They use euphemisms to conceal disagreeable concepts and steer clear of uncomfortable or terrifying topics. Additionally, this shields the speaker and the audience from unfavorable remarks made by others.

There are seven dialects among the Kikuyu, according to Muriuki (1974) and Mutahi (1977). These are the Ki-Embu, Ki-Mbeere, Gĩgĩcũgũ (Kirinyaga), Kikabete (Kiambu), Ki-mathira (Nyeri), Mutemi (Muranga), and Ki-Ndia. Despite the fact that speakers of these seven Kikuyu dialects frequently use euphemisms and taboo words in particular social contexts, each dialect has its own unique euphemism expressions, distribution, value, and conceptual characteristics with regard to social acceptability (Gathigia & Ndungu, 2015). Furthermore, the distinct semantic content communicated in each dialect determines their interpretive value and informativity. There are some

euphemisms and taboo expressions specific to each of these dialects that are not found in other dialects. This indicates that there are significant differences between the expressions in terms of the dialects and occasionally the social contexts in which they are used (Njoroge, 2014).

There are similar ideas in the Kikuyu language that speakers of other languages might find too offensive to discuss without looking foolish. To make more subtly hurtful references to such ideas, the speakers employ euphemisms. According to Njoroge (2014), euphemisms are utilized frequently in everyday speech and have two major purposes: first, they help to balance the impact of some lexical elements that are considered harmful and hence should not be spoken, and second, they are sensitive in lessening their influence. This study therefore sought to establish the types of politeness employed in the euphemistic Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect expressions and how meaning is communicated as well as find out how the use of euphemistic words and phrases can be a barrier to communication in Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. Lastly, it established how social values are expressed in different social contexts while employing the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Globally, across the African continent and within various dialects of Kenyan languages, euphemism serves as a linguistic strategy to conceal or sanitize expressions considered offensive due to cultural norms. It functions as both a face-saving device and a tool for effective meaning conveyance in social interactions. In Africa, euphemism has been studied as a pragmatic tool for civility, politeness, and indirect communication. However, despite this wide scholarly interest, there exists a clear research gap in the study of euphemisms within the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of the Kikuyu language. Among the seven Kikuyu dialects, Gĩgĩcũgũ remains underrepresented and least explored in existing euphemism research. This lack of scholarly attention resulted in limited understanding of how euphemism functions in Gĩgĩcũgũ, particularly in socially sensitive contexts such as circumcision, childbirth, diseases, sex and relationships, weddings, and church activities. Therefore, this study sought to fill the gap by offering a lexico-pragmatic interpretation of euphemisms in naturally occurring speech among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers. It aimed to uncover the levels of politeness embedded in

euphemistic expressions, analyze how these expressions reflect social values, and examine potential communication barriers arising from their use. In doing so, the study contributes new knowledge to Kikuyu linguistics and serves as a foundation for future research.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To analyze the use of politeness strategies in euphemized expressions to convey meaning across various social contexts in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect.
- ii. To investigate the extent to which euphemistic expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect create communication challenges due to generational, social, and cultural differences.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of euphemistic expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of Kikuyu, with a focus on how different types of politeness strategies are employed across various social contexts. The study aimed to explore how euphemisms function both as tools for maintaining social harmony and as potential barriers to effective communication due to generational, social, and cultural differences.

1.5 Research Questions

This research was guided by the following research questions:

- i. In what ways are politeness strategies reflected in euphemized expressions within various social contexts in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect?
- ii. To what extent do the euphemistic expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect contribute to communication challenges across different generations, social groups, and cultural backgrounds?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study has contributed to the documentation and preservation of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect by analyzing euphemisms used in culturally sensitive contexts. It has offered insight into how language reflects societal values, taboos, and norms within the

community. By focusing on the lexico-pragmatic features of euphemism, the study enhanced the understanding of meaning, politeness, and indirectness in natural communication. It also added to the limited body of research on pragmatic strategies in Kenyan languages, laying a foundation for future linguistic and cultural studies. The findings of this study benefits members of the Gĩkũyũ-speaking community, especially those from the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect region, they have benefited from increased recognition and preservation of their linguistic heritage

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study examined the use of euphemism in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect through the lens of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. It focused on how speakers employ euphemistic language as a strategy to manage face needs, both positive and negative, in culturally sensitive domains such as circumcision, childbirth, diseases, sex and relationships, church activities, and weddings. The research analyzed how lexical choices and indirect expressions are used to maintain politeness, avoid face-threatening acts, and uphold social harmony. Data was drawn from naturally occurring conversations and focus group discussions within the Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community, using a qualitative approach to interpret the pragmatic functions of euphemism in real-life interaction.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The study's limits were carefully considered. They aided in defining the breadth and depth of this study and provided a clearer focus. First, there was linguistic diversity where the dialectal differences were problematic even within the Kikuyu language. Findings were not applicable to all Kikuyu speakers since the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect differ slightly from other Kikuyu dialects. To mitigate this, the study clearly limited its scope to the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, emphasizing that the findings are dialect-specific. Comparative insights were briefly acknowledged, but the analysis did not attempt to generalize across all Kikuyu dialects. This approach maintained internal consistency and linguistic focus.

Secondly, there was culture sensitivity since euphemisms frequently refers to delicate subjects such as childbirth, sex, death, and circumcision. Open communication on these

subjects made participants uncomfortable, which would have reduced the accuracy and richness of the findings. To address this, data collection relied on naturalistic methods such as focus group discussions and observation of naturally occurring speech, where participants spoke more freely in familiar settings. The researcher also ensured ethical practices such as informed consent, participant anonymity, and culturally appropriate moderation to foster a safe space for expression.

The translation challenges were also experienced in conveying all of the nuances and connotations of the original idioms when translating euphemisms and nuanced meanings from Gĩgĩcũgũ to English. To mitigate this, the researcher provided glosses and detailed contextual explanations alongside translations. Where appropriate, the original expressions were retained with annotated commentary to preserve the cultural and semantic depth. Consultation with bilingual speakers also supported accuracy.

Finally, there was subjectivity of interpretation whereby Lexico-pragmatic analysis was prone to subjectivity since various researchers or participants understand euphemisms differently based on their own experiences or the settings in which they are used. To reduce subjectivity, the study adopted a triangulation approach, cross-checking interpretations through focus group discussions, peer reviews, and theoretical grounding in established pragmatic frameworks. Reflexivity was also practiced, with the researcher acknowledging their own interpretive lens.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Dysphemism:	A derogatory or unpleasant term used instead of a pleasant or neutral one.
Euphemisms:	Terms or phrases that are used to subtly discuss forbidden or delicate topics.
Face Saving Acts:	An act that prevents damage to one's reputation or the loss of people's respect for you.
Face Threatening Act:	An act that threatens someone's positive or negative face.
Face:	One's public self-esteem or everything in which one has an emotional investment.
Interpretation:	Process of understanding and explaining the meaning of words, phrases or texts.
Lexical Analysis:	Examining the words and phrases in a language and how they combine to form meaningful units.
Lexico-pragmatic:	It is the analysis of how people use particular words or phrases to communicate meaning politely, indirectly, or appropriately depending on who they're speaking to, what they're talking about, and the social setting.
Negative politeness:	The desire of a participant in an engagement not to be forced upon or to have their activities obstructed.
Offensive:	Causing someone to feel resentful, upset or annoyed.
Politeness:	"The ways in which languages convey the social separation between the giver and the recipient as well as different roles." (Levinson and Brown, 1987).
Positive politeness:	Contains the hearer's wish to win others over during conversations.
Pragmatics:	A branch of linguistics that focuses on contextual language use.
Social Events:	Interactions in social settings that influence the use of a language.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Euphemism

Politeness is the act of being considerate towards the reputation or dignity of another person. When communicating, it is essential to consider the reputation and dignity of both the speaker and the listener. To achieve this, euphemism serves as a linguistic strategy that softens the impact of words that might otherwise seem unpleasant, harsh, or offensive. Instead of direct and blunt expressions, socially acceptable terms are often used as substitutes through euphemisms. This is especially helpful when talking about delicate subjects like death, physiological functions, or societal taboos (Pratiknyo, 2016).

Under Al-Qadi's (2009) framework, euphemisms are understood as phrases that appear more pleasant or less confrontational. He illustrates this with examples from English such as "senior citizen" as a substitute for "old person," noting that in many cultures such substitutions carry social politeness. He further classifies euphemisms into positive and negative politeness strategies: positive politeness involves choosing terms that affirm social solidarity or respect (for instance, using more prestigious occupational titles), while negative politeness seeks to avoid offense by choosing less imposing or more indirect forms.

However, more recent studies deepen our understanding of how euphemism works in real social practice, especially from a lexico-pragmatic perspective. Naumenko and Kryvonis (2023) analyze how euphemisms in modern Chinese are formed through metaphor, metonymy, antonomasia, and other lexical devices, showing how cultural taboos and historical traditions constrain which words may be used directly and which must be softened. Their work illustrates that euphemistic choice is not arbitrary but closely linked to social norms and taboo in the linguistic community. In the field of English pragmatics, Zhang, Deng, & Han (2023) demonstrate how English euphemisms often begin with indirect hints or preambles before revealing the taboo referent, thus managing listener expectations and maintaining politeness.

In African and multilingual settings, scholars are also exploring how euphemistic vocabulary intersects with local culture, social hierarchy, and political discourse. In Tshivenda, for example, Mudau (2024) shows that politicians employ euphemistic language to soften criticism or avoid directly confronting sensitive issues, often strategically shaping public perception. This aligns with broader findings in discourse studies where euphemism is a tool of persuasion and face-saving in political and media communication (Paronyan & Barseghyan, 2023). Finally, computational models like EUREKA (Keh, Bharadwaj, Liu, Tedeschi, Gangal, & Navigli, 2022) show that whether a lexical item functions as a euphemism depends heavily on context, sentiment, and usage patterns, reinforcing that euphemism is not a static lexicon, but a dynamic interaction of lexis and pragmatics.

2.1.1 Negative Euphemism

Negative euphemisms are verbal strategies used to avoid direct mention of uncomfortable or socially sensitive topics, often to prevent embarrassment or offense. Speakers replace terms that might cause social discomfort with indirect, softened, or veiled expressions, what might be called lexical avoidance. For example, poverty is often referred to as “low income” rather than blunt labels in both English and Arabic (Al-Qadi, 2009), illustrating how lexical choice helps maintain social dignity.

Building on that, more recent research shows how consistently negative euphemisms are used across very different contexts. In a study of Nigerian undergraduates, Edward and Nina (2023) examined how students use euphemistic and syntactic strategies in online settings to conceal depressive experiences. They found that indirect language, figurative expressions, and lexical change were central to avoiding stigma.

Other empirical work reveals that euphemism extends beyond traditional taboo topics. For instance, Naumenko and Kryvonis (2023) present a lexico-pragmatic analysis of how negative euphemisms in modern Chinese are shaped by metaphor, phonetic allusion, antonomasia, and taboo replacement, all influenced by cultural, moral, and ritual constraints. Similarly, Normurodova (2024) examines political discourse and finds that public speakers often rely on softened expressions or euphemistic framing

when addressing criticism or controversial policies, in order to avoid threatening face or provoking public backlash.

Such studies underscore that negative euphemisms are typically employed in contexts characterized by power asymmetry, emotional sensitivity, or the risk of social offense. These communicative contexts exert pressure on speakers to minimize the face-threatening potential of direct speech. In this context, the present study sought to determine whether similar strategies are employed in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. Specifically, it investigated whether speakers tend to favor indirectness or lexical avoidance when addressing sensitive, taboo, or socially delicate topics. Furthermore, the study explored the specific linguistic forms these euphemisms take, such as metaphor, circumlocution, omission, or lexical substitution, and how they function to manage politeness, preserve social harmony, and avoid embarrassment or interpersonal conflict.

2.1.2 Positive Euphemism

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness reflects a speaker's desire to build solidarity and affirm the hearer's self-image. In essence, it signals friendliness, inclusion, and emotional support. Speakers using positive euphemisms aim to be likable and considerate, often modifying words or phrases to reflect cultural expectations of warmth, respect, or prestige. For example, instead of calling someone "a maid," one might say "house manager" or "domestic assistant" to show appreciation and minimize social stigma.

Al-Qadi (2009) supports this view, noting that speakers of both English and Arabic often choose elevated or softened alternatives to create rapport with the listener. He illustrates this with euphemistic job titles like "sanitation officer" for "garbage collector," which show sensitivity to social status and emotional dignity. This use of positive euphemism, he argues, enhances the speaker's own social image while maintaining harmony in interactions.

Recent research has further expanded our understanding of positive euphemism as a social strategy. Zhang et al. (2023) observe that in English, speakers often use pre-modifiers and metaphorical language to smooth over sensitive topics in public or formal

settings. Similarly, Naumenko and Kryvonis (2023) show how in modern Mandarin Chinese, euphemistic constructions are often chosen to demonstrate politeness, modesty, or group solidarity, reflecting shared cultural norms.

In African contexts, the link between euphemism and communal respect is especially visible. Mudau (2024), in his study of Tshivenda political discourse, found that positive euphemisms were used to uphold leadership figures' public image. For example, political leaders were referred to using titles or phrases emphasizing their service and wisdom, even when discussing controversial actions or policies. This supports the idea that euphemism is not merely linguistic politeness but also a tool for social cohesion and face-saving.

In Kenyan languages, similar patterns are observed. In the Kĩiveti dialect of Kiambu, certain topics such as death, illness, and infertility are traditionally not spoken of directly. Instead, speakers use metaphor, circumlocution, or culturally acceptable substitutes, like referring to death as “going to sleep permanently” or “joining the ancestors.” While this may reflect negative politeness in avoiding taboo, it also aligns with positive politeness by showing empathy and solidarity with the bereaved (Mbaka, 2014).

Moreover, digital discourse is influencing euphemistic practice. A study by Paronyan and Barseghyan (2023) reveals that in social media contexts, positive euphemism is used not only to preserve politeness but also to shape online personas. Words are carefully chosen to present oneself as kind, tolerant, or intelligent, showing how euphemism adapts to changing communication platforms. Therefore, positive euphemism is a powerful communicative strategy rooted in empathy, respect, and social norms. Whether in interpersonal, political, or digital spaces, it allows speakers to express sensitive ideas without embarrassment or offense, while also strengthening social bonds. In the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, examining such euphemisms offers a window into how community members build solidarity and affirm one another's dignity, especially when discussing traditionally delicate matters.

2.2 Functions of Euphemism

Euphemisms are widely used to address sensitive subjects such as death, war, sexual relations, body functions, and disability (Brind & Wilkinson, 2008; Hajoti, 2012). They reduce the emotional impact of harsh terms, enabling discussions about difficult topics without eliciting strong negative reactions (Pavlenko, 2006). By neutralizing stigma, euphemisms make such subjects more acceptable in discourse (Nguti, 2013; Mayfield, 2009). Stockwell (2002) emphasizes their role in instilling morality and social norms, particularly in the family, where they facilitate communication and socialization of the young.

Hughes (2006) highlights how euphemisms maintain social propriety, while dysphemisms disrupt it, reflecting and perpetuating societal hierarchies. As universal linguistic tools, euphemisms align with cultural traditions and norms. For instance, a study on the Oromo people in Ethiopia revealed that invented names are used to replace direct references to close relatives, reflecting respect and adherence to cultural standards (Mboya, 2002). In African societies, euphemisms are often employed to show respect for elders and to replace offensive terms.

Politeness theories by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Scollon and Scollon (2001) explore the role of civility in communication. Politeness is defined as expressing social distance and respecting roles within relationships (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Studies suggest that politeness ensures cooperation and prevents conflict between speakers and listeners. Fraser (1990) identifies four approaches to politeness: the social norm view, conversational-max view, face-saving view, and conversational contract view. Politeness, conveyed both verbally and non-verbally, requires adherence to cultural norms, as deviations are seen as breaches of etiquette (Watts, 2003).

Face-saving theory emphasizes that people use euphemisms to preserve emotional attachment and reputation (Fraser, 1990). Politeness strategies may enhance, maintain, or risk one's face, a concept foundational to Brown and Levinson's theory. Their framework introduces two types of politeness: positive (expressing friendliness) and negative (avoiding imposition), both integral to communication competence (Hymes, 1972).

Leech (2005) argues that communication aims to balance accuracy, courtesy, and relevance. While clarity is important, civility often takes precedence in conversations (Lakoff, 1973). Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that politeness fosters cooperation and reduces conflict, essential for effective and meaningful communication.

2.3 Barriers of Using Euphemism

There are strong objections to the use of euphemisms since they can be used to deceive people, even if it is generally accepted that using them to make unmentionable issues more manageable and less insulting is a positive thing (Jackall, 2009). Euphemisms can also conceal words that appear to be clear-cut and simple beneath ones that are misleading or unduly complicated (Lacone, 2003). Furthermore, LaRocque (2006), who concentrated on contentious parts of certain euphemisms, has observed that euphemisms pertaining to military, commercial, and political themes can be especially misleading and contentious. (Safire, 2008) has endorsed this viewpoint and added that in addition to euphemisms related to politics, business, and the military, environmental issues have given rise to a number of euphemisms, many of which are misleading and heavily contested. Environmental issues receive a lot of attention from both conservation groups and the mass media. The use of "plausible deniability" by Richard Nixon to refer to "deception" (Ford, 2004, p. 120), "downsizing" to describe the act of laying off a significant number of workers or employees "collateral damage" to refer to civilian deaths in war situations and "extraordinary rendition" to refer to "kidnapping followed by torture" are a few examples of contentious and misleading euphemisms.

Euphemisms can protect sensitive sentiments and lessen the effect of unpleasant facts, but they also frequently create obstacles to open and honest communication (Walter, 2014). By masking the true meaning, they can impede effective understanding, accountability and action. Walter (2014) addresses euphemisms associated to death and dying, examining hurdles including the unwillingness to confront the reality of death and the consequent influence on communication and grief processes, even though using euphemisms is an excellent approach to communicate and avoid offending someone.

Munyiri (2006) conducted study on the gender-language relationship in the Gi-Kabete dialect of the Gikuyu language. She looked into how much language connected to one gender contributes to the marginalization of that particular gender. Simon's (2007) research makes the argument that certain individuals are unable to understand the intended meaning of euphemisms since they are widely used in HIV/AIDS discourse, which leads to communication breakdown. She comes to the conclusion that euphemisms are insufficient to convey meaning and that the intended meaning is occasionally distorted.

Euphemisms are frequently constrained by the linguistic and cultural context in which they are employed (Allan & Burridge, 1991). What is taboo depends on cultural norms, which change greatly amongst civilizations. In cross-cultural communication, euphemisms can be problematic when they are misinterpreted or even disrespectful because what is softer in one language could not mean the same thing in another. Euphemisms for death, for instance, may be viewed as disrespectful in some cultures, which makes communication difficult. Euphemisms' efficacy differs greatly based on social and cultural circumstances (Dewaele, 2004). Effective communication can be hampered in multilingual or multicultural environments by euphemisms that are understood in one culture but misread or misunderstood in another.

Euphemisms can put the listener under cognitive strain by making them figure out what the softened language is meant to mean (Pinker, 2007). This may cause misunderstandings or confusion, particularly if the person listening is unfamiliar with the particular euphemism being used. The problem here is that euphemisms, especially in formal or technical communication, have the tendency to obfuscate meaning rather than make it clear.

Lakoff (1993) investigates how euphemisms might cause a social or psychological barrier between the speaker and the hearer. Genuine communication may be hampered by this distance since euphemisms might be interpreted as being dishonest or as a means of avoiding having to face uncomfortable truths. Euphemisms, for example, might impede meaningful conversations about serious topics like illness or death and result in a lack of understanding or emotional support.

The urge to be politically correct frequently motivates the use of euphemism, which can occasionally raise ethical questions. The problem here is that euphemisms, especially in corporate or political speech, can be exploited to distort truth or to control views. This may give the impression that the speaker is trying to skirt responsibility or conceal the truth, which can breed mistrust or skepticism among the audience (Fairclough, 1989).

Euphemisms can differ dramatically between socioeconomic classes and generations (Hughes, 2006). In certain populations, euphemisms considered appropriate or effective might be misunderstood or even deemed objectionable. When the intended softening of language fails to resonate with the listener, it provides a barrier to communication, especially in cross-class or intergenerational relationships.

Lutz (1989) investigates the unethical manipulation of public opinion through the use of euphemisms. Using phrases like as "enhanced interrogation" in favor of "torture," for instance, might distort the truth about the acts being discussed and encourage the public to become complacent or even endorse unethical behavior. Because this euphemism purposefully misleads the audience, it puts obstacles in the way of accountability and openness.

Euphemisms can widen generational divides. For example, older generations may use terms such as "expecting" rather than "pregnant," which younger people who prefer more direct language may find antiquated or ambiguous (Lakoff, 2000). Intergenerational communication may be hampered by miscommunication or accusations of insensitivity brought on by this disparity in language use.

Euphemisms may have an impact on cognitive processing. The listeners may therefore have to employ more cognitive resources to interpret speakers who use euphemisms to lessen the effect of their statements. Communication may then become less efficient and move more slowly as a result of this extra processing (Bowers & Pleydell-Pearce 2011).

Euphemisms can establish a psychological barrier between speakers, making it challenging to face painful realities (Goffman, 1967). When talking about a pet's death, for instance, using phrases like "put to sleep" rather than "euthanize" can keep both the speaker and the listener from completely realizing the emotional gravity of the circumstance. The genuine essence of the experience is softened to the point of nearly being abstract, and this avoidance of direct terminology might result in a lack of closure or understanding. Euphemisms can cause an emotional detachment that hinders real communication and emotional processing, which is the obstacle in this situation.

2.4 Lexico-Pragmatic Interpretation

Interpreting linguistic meaning lexico-pragmatically is the study of the connections between words (lexicon) and their meanings as shaped by context and use (pragmatics). It involves understanding how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning in particular social and situational settings. This includes examining aspects such as contextual meaning, speaker intention, politeness strategies, implicature, and how word choices contribute to effective and appropriate communication (Murphy, 2003). Scholars explore language from both the lexical (word-level) and pragmatic (contextual meaning-level) perspectives to understand how meaning is created, negotiated, and interpreted in real-life discourse (Geeraerts, 2010). This study will therefore apply lexico-pragmatic interpretation to Gĩgĩcũgũ euphemisms by examining how culturally embedded word choices convey implicit meanings shaped by social context, speaker intention, and communicative appropriateness.

The lexicon refers to the vocabulary of a language, encompassing not only individual words but also detailed information about their pronunciation, form, meaning, and grammatical behavior. Payne (2010) characterizes the lexicon as a network of knowledge stored in a speaker's memory, consisting of the fundamental form–meaning composites that serve as the building blocks of communication. This perspective positions the lexicon as a vital and dynamic component of language proficiency, integral to both linguistic competence and performance. In a similar vein, Jackendoff (2002) emphasizes that the lexicon includes morphemes, words, idioms, and constructions, each accompanied by syntactic, phonological, and conceptual information. Together, these views highlight the lexicon as more than a static list of

words, it is a complex, structured system essential to the generation and interpretation of meaningful language.

The area of linguistics that studies meaning in context is called pragmatics. It is the study of how meaning is transmitted and interpreted depending on the communicative context, including speaker intention, listener inference, and situational factors (Murphy, 2003). Murphy looks at how lexical meaning interpretation is influenced by pragmatic relations such as implicature, presupposition, reference, and speech acts. She explores how these relationships are interpreted in spoken discourse and texts, as well as how they are processed in the mental lexicon. Understanding the cognitive mechanisms behind lexico-pragmatic interpretation is one area in which the study is especially informative.

Geeraerts (2010) gives a thorough account of the development of the field of lexical pragmatics, following its progression from structuralism linguistics to cognitive approaches. His research explores several meaning representation frameworks, such as prototype theory and componential analysis. In his argument that meaning is frequently generated depending on the socio-cultural and pragmatic settings in which language is used, he highlights the importance of context and the mental lexicon in pragmatic interpretation.

In linguistics, interpretation is the process of elucidating language in its context. In order to comprehend language use, pragmatic considerations such as speaker intentions and cultural knowledge are taken into account in addition to literal meanings (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Sperber and Wilson contend that interpretation requires striking a balance between communicative payoff and cognitive effort in their relevance theory. They suggest that people interpret words by looking for the meaning that makes the most sense in the situation. Interpretation, in the words of Clark (1996), is an interactive process in which listeners and speakers work together. In order to clarify how people, comprehend one another during a conversation, he presents ideas like shared ground and cooperative action. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study emphasizes that the interpretation of euphemistic language is deeply embedded in

pragmatic reasoning, social interaction, and cultural competence, core elements in the lexico-pragmatic analysis of Gĩgĩcũgũ euphemisms.

2.5 Face

Pratiknyo (2016) describes the face as the outward expression of someone's identity, intentionally displayed to gain recognition. Every society finds value in the concept of "face," which everyone wishes to protect. The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during particular contact, is face. According to pragmatics, it's a distinct social and emotional sense of self that a person wants his or her interlocutors to acknowledge. As a result, individuals are inextricably linked to their "face," which is a universal symbol of self-respect. On the other hand, Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as an emotionally charged characteristic that must be presented during social interactions, and can either be maintained or lost. In communication, individuals not only respond to the immediate context, but also to their own desires for maintaining their reputation. People will act in communication both in accordance with their facial desires and the circumstances in which they find themselves. A fundamental characteristic of people is their desire for their faces to be gratified.

Positive and negative faces are the two facets of a face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A person with a positive face expresses their desire to be accepted by others. Negative face, on the other hand, represents a part of a person that desires freedom from external constraints. People typically try to satisfy each other's facial desires in order to maintain good communication. Nonetheless, there are situations when people are unable to appease the demands of others, which may cause them to harm or even threaten others' faces. Additionally, people have the ability to act in ways that endanger the hearer's and speaker's respective positive or negative faces.

Face-threatening acts are described by Brown and Levinson (1987) as any type of act that goes against the speaker's or the hearer's desires. Brown and Levinson provide four highest-level politeness strategies: the bare on record technique, the positive politeness strategy, the negative politeness strategy, and off record strategy. These strategies serve to mitigate potential conflicts in communication by addressing the speaker's or hearer's

face needs. They emphasize the importance of context and social relationships in determining how politeness strategies are applied to maintain harmony and reduce tension during interactions.

2.6 Gikuyu Language and Gikuyu Dialects

The Agikuyu people of Kenya speak Gikuyu, a language that belongs to the Central Bantu branch of the Niger-Congo family (Dwyer, 1997). Predominantly spoken in Central Kenya, Gikuyu forms part of the Bantu Thagichu subgroup, a linguistic cluster that stretches across Kenya and into Tanzania. This geographical spread highlights the language's rich historical and cultural connections within the region.

Wacera (2008) offers a detailed classification of Gikuyu language varieties, identifying differences rooted in phonology, grammar, and semantics. According to her framework, the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect is spoken in the eastern parts of Central Kenya; Kimathira in the north; Ki-mutemi in the central region; and Gi-kabete in the south. Complementing this view, Muriuki (1974) expands the classification to seven dialects, including Ki-Embu, Ki-Mbeere, Gĩgĩcũgũ (Kirinyaga), Kikabete (Kiambu), Ki-mathira (Nyeri), Mutemi (Muranga), and Ki-Ndia. This diversity underscores the linguistic richness and complexity within the Kikuyu-speaking population.

Githiora (2008) emphasizes the significance of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect in shaping regional identity in Central Kenya. His research reveals how speakers of Gĩgĩcũgũ consciously maintain their unique linguistic heritage, even within the broader Kikuyu community, as a marker of cultural and social belonging. The distinct phonological, morphological, and lexical features of Gĩgĩcũgũ further set it apart from other dialects, as documented by Karuru (2013). For example, specific sound patterns and vocabulary choices in Gĩgĩcũgũ reflect localized cultural experiences and historical developments that contribute to its distinctiveness.

The focus of this research is primarily on the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, the main variety spoken in Gichugu, Kirinyaga County (Njoroge, 2014). However, this focus does not negate the presence of other dialects in the area. The dynamic nature of language use in this

region is shaped by factors such as intermarriage and migration, which facilitate the coexistence and blending of multiple Kikuyu dialects.

2.7 Social Context

In linguistics, social contexts relate to the conditions or settings in which communication occurs, such as participants, geographical location, and cultural norms. These contexts include factors like power dynamics (for example, the speaker's authority or social standing), relationships and social positions (such as those with family, coworkers, or peers), cultural values and conventions (for instance, what is deemed appropriate, forbidden, or courteous), and situational circumstances for example, professional versus casual environments (Mbaka, 2014). The Role of Euphemisms and Dysphemism in Social settings is significant in shaping their use. Euphemisms are courteous or circumspect words or phrases that are used to prevent making others uncomfortable or offended. Euphemisms soften unpleasant facts in sensitive social circumstances (such as religion, sexuality, disease, or death). For instance, use "passed away" rather than "died. Dysphemisms are words that are meant to be hurtful or unpleasant. They are frequently employed to elicit or convey unpleasant feelings, particularly in sarcastic, angry, or humorous situations (Njoroge, 2014).

Euphemism use varies across social settings, each influencing how sensitive topics are softened or reframed (Mbaka, 2014). In religious contexts, for example, language referring to death, disease, or divine judgment is often softened to reduce discomfort. The phrase "*gone to a better place*" is commonly used in place of "*dead*." In conversations about relationships and sexuality, euphemisms help minimize taboo subjects and make them more socially acceptable. For instance, "*sleep together*" is preferred over the more explicit "*have sex*." Similarly, in political discourse, euphemisms frequently serve to obscure or soften harsh realities. A notable example is the term "*collateral damage*," which is used to refer to civilian casualties. Workplace hierarchies also rely on euphemisms to maintain professional decorum and avoid offending either supervisors or subordinates. The phrase "*let go*" is often employed instead of the blunt term "*fired*." Finally, in health and medical contexts, words that may provoke fear or revulsion are commonly replaced with gentler alternatives. For example, "*procedure*" is often used instead of "*surgery*." The current study offers a

culturally specific, pragmatically grounded analysis of euphemism use and interpretation, how meaning and misunderstanding are negotiated within Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community.

2.8 Social Values Expressed in Politeness

This component of the study aims to determine how social ideals manifest in different dialects in terms of both positive and negative politeness. The purpose of this section is to provide an explanation for how social ideals are reflected in a language's positive and negative forms of politeness. Positive politeness is inclusiveness and understanding between people. Positive politeness is the art of beautifying or coloring reality, even lies, with compliments and encouragements (Mbaka, 2014). Being courteous to others improves one's reputation and social status. Conversely, negative politeness means that you are honoring other people's privacy. This is typically accomplished by recognizing each person's right to privacy, exercising discretion when making decisions, and keeping other people's sentiments in mind when having a conversation.

Social values are the moral precepts that define a society and are influenced by its institutions, cultural beliefs, and social dynamics (Mbaka, 2014). Social values serve as a society's guiding principles, assisting individuals and members in acting appropriately because they define what is right and wrong, what is permitted and what is not, and other concepts in a community that guarantee peaceful coexistence and harmony. They serve as the focal point for all interactions between group members. It is significant to remember that every member of a certain culture adheres to social norms established by custom. People's behavior is based on societal values, which also assist people in evaluating their relationships, objectives, thoughts, and emotions (Soles, 2009). Values serve as a unifying factor in society and set the baseline for social interactions. It is true that a society's common ideals provide its members with a feeling of identity.

2.8.1 Social Values in Positive Politeness

Positive politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is centered on a person's need to be liked by others during a social exchange. It is the favorable perception that the hearer holds of oneself. In order for the hearer's facial desires to be acknowledged and honored, the speaker in the conversation must be aware of those wishes. Solidarity

with the hearer is one way that positive politeness embodies societal values. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), showing support for the person being heard is one way to practice constructive politeness. The societal benefit of cooperation is expressed in this way. A collection of customs known as politeness is similar to those suggested by Grice's cooperative ideals. Positive face is satisfied by positive politeness in two ways: by pointing out commonalities between the interactants and by expressing admiration for the other person's perception of themselves.

The need for approval and the maintenance of a favorable self-image are known as "positive face." To prevent offense, positive politeness employs techniques like highlighting friendship (Mbaka, 2014). Interlocutors perform verbal acts, such as offering friendship, offering praise, expressing direct attention, and so forth, that typically reflect the positive face desires of an individual. According to him, speakers take advantage of linguistic chances to communicate civility through friendships since they are aware of cultural expectations.

2.8.2 Social Values in Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is the hearer's wish for autonomy (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In this instance, the speaker's need to acknowledge the addressee's demand for autonomy is subordinated to the wish to not be forced upon. Therefore, it's critical that the speaker makes every effort to refrain from infringing on the hearer's freedom during a social engagement. The speaker accomplishes this, according to Al-Qadi (2009), by avoiding or eliminating any use of language that the society views as derogatory. Accordingly, any action that could be harmful to the hearer's perception of themselves is a face-threatening act (FTA) and needs to be avoided or removed in order to lessen the harm to the hearer's face. In an interaction, negative politeness is typically employed to avoid looking foolish. This is accomplished by deleting everything including all statements that are uncomfortable to deal with directly and substituting them with statements that are viewed as nice. The use of metaphorical language, roundabouts or circumlocutions, reality-magnification, and exaggerations results in the more amicable statements. Negative politeness, on the other hand, uses euphemism to substitute more acceptable terms and topics for those that are considered objectionable.

Human communication, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is a crucial component of the linguistic skills one learns. Additionally, politeness is a necessary element of human communication without which meaningful exchanges would not occur. Respecting someone's right to privacy and freedom of movement is part of being polite. Negative politeness deflates and lessens the consequences of offensive and prohibited words to the hearer's face wants, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). The social norms and cultural requirements that control communication and other social interactions are taken into consideration in this process. Social values are conveyed and reinforced in a social interaction by avoidance and by eliminating particular lexical elements and subjects that are judged taboo and objectionable.

According to Al-Qadi (2009), euphemism is the replacement of lexical elements and subjects that local speakers find offensive or taboo with alternatives that are viewed as less objectionable by society norms and standards. According to this study, Al-Qadi is referring to negative politeness, which involves replacing some objectionable lexical terms with less offensive euphemisms and avoiding or eliminating them altogether. This process reflects a conscious effort to maintain social harmony and adhere to cultural expectations by softening the impact of potentially offensive language. It highlights the role of euphemisms as a tool for navigating sensitive topics in a way that aligns with societal decorum.

Based on Mbaka (2014), social values are expressed by speakers of the Kiĩveti dialect by avoiding and eliminating subjects and vocabulary elements that are prohibited or offensive and replacing them with less offending words. This was noted among speakers of the Kiĩveti dialect of the Kiambu language in the social context on the area like of pregnancy and delivery, where some vocabulary elements and expressions are deemed too insulting and hence taboo. In addition, the speaker protects his own reputation, which would be at jeopardy if the bald on record tactic were to be used. The actual study differed from this since it was on the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of Kikuyu language.

2.9 Previous Related Studies

A comprehensive analysis of how euphemisms and dysphemism function in response to social taboos is provided in the work of Allan and Burridge (2006). They argue that

euphemisms evolve to align with shifting societal attitudes toward sensitive topics such as sex, death, and disability. As a result, their theoretical framework on euphemisms and taboo language improved lexico-pragmatic understanding of how the Kikuyu community employs euphemisms to skirt socially acceptable bounds.

Allan and Burridge (1991) examine the use of euphemisms as a linguistic tactic to avoid objectionable words in public discourse in their work. The research shows how euphemistic language is chosen based on cultural and societal standards, whereas dysphemisms are used as instruments of control or protest. Their subject of dysphemism is pertinent even if the study's focus was on euphemisms. Dysphemism draws attention to the lines separating courteous and unpleasant speech, which was crucial to comprehending Kikuyu social hierarchies particularly Gĩgĩcũgũ for this study. In these hierarchies, certain words are purposefully avoided in particular situations in order to establish authority or convey disapproval.

Language's reflection of human cognition and social norms is explored by Pinker (2007), who examines euphemisms as tactful linguistic choices used to ease socially awkward conversations. His analysis reveals that words have multi-layered meanings, both literal and figurative, that shift depending on context. This semantic flexibility was key to grasping how euphemisms function among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers. Pinker's findings on meaning modification help trace the pragmatic transformations euphemisms undergo in the dialect.

Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss politeness strategies in their thesis. They argue that euphemisms are employed to preserve social peace particularly in hierarchical or power- imbalanced situations. They contend that euphemisms maintain the social faces of the speaker and the hearer by reducing the severity of face-threatening activities (FTAs). A strong foundation for examining how Kikuyu euphemisms are employed to preserve social harmony, avoid offense, and handle delicate subjects is provided by Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. These ideas about indirectness, face-saving techniques, and positive and negative politeness gave the researcher important theoretical tools for lexico-pragmatic interpretation of euphemisms in Kikuyu Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect.

Scholarly investigations have continued to explore euphemism as a complex linguistic and social phenomenon across domains such as politics, media, gender, and intercultural discourse. A significant contribution to this area is the work of Kapron-King and Xu (2021), who conducted a large-scale diachronic corpus study to test the long-held assumption that women use euphemisms more frequently than men. Contrary to previous claims, their findings revealed no significant gender-based disparity in euphemism usage across various English corpora. This study is important in dispelling gendered stereotypes and underscores the necessity of empirical approaches when examining linguistic behavior. In contrast, the present study focuses on the lexico-pragmatic interpretation of Gĩgĩcũgũ euphemism, examining how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and understood within its specific cultural and linguistic context, a perspective that remains underexplored in previous euphemism research.

Previous studies have shown that euphemisms in political and media discourse serve persuasive, image-enhancing, and ideological functions. Hasyim, Nurkamto, Sumarlam, & Santosa (2020) identified strategies like metaphorical substitution and lexical mitigation in Indonesian election campaigns, while Putra and Widodo (2020) highlighted nine types of euphemisms in presidential debates, used to protect face and appeal to voters. Similarly, Jaganegara, Marlina & Rahmaewati (2020) found that American political reporting used metaphor and lexical remodeling to soften sensitive topics, and Ahmed and Jomaa (2022) showed that euphemistic framing in U.S. newspapers helps shape public perception. Unlike these studies, which focus on public discourse, the present research shifts attention to the lexico-pragmatic use of euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, exploring how meaning is shaped by cultural context and everyday interaction.

Sociolinguistic research has highlighted how euphemism use varies across cultures, age groups, and social settings. Ramadhani and Jufrizal (2022) compared teenagers and adults in the Minangkabau community, noting generational differences in euphemism types and motivations, adults prioritized politeness, while youth used euphemism to express discomfort or resistance. Sharafutdinov (2024) took a diachronic and cross-linguistic approach, analyzing euphemism in English and Uzbek, focusing on semantic bleaching and cyclical renewal in sensitive areas like gender and politics. While these

studies reveal the cultural and temporal dynamics of euphemism, they do not examine lexico-pragmatic use in Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of Kikuyu language the gap that the current study fills.

A more domain-specific examination is seen in the work of Malyuga and Rimmer (2023), who investigated euphemism in South African economic discourse. They argue that euphemisms in financial reporting are not merely linguistic embellishments but powerful socio-cultural tools that function to obscure economic hardship, foster optimism, and maintain institutional credibility. Their work also highlights the intersection of euphemism with discourse power, as linguistic choices subtly manage stakeholder perceptions in volatile economic climates. While this research contributes valuable insight into the strategic and institutional functions of euphemism, it remains focused on formal economic discourse and does not engage with the broader, community-based, and lexico-pragmatic dimensions of euphemism use in indigenous languages; the current study fills this gap by examining euphemism within the natural speech of the Gĩgĩcũgũ community, thereby expanding the understanding of euphemism's role beyond formal domains and into everyday social interaction.

While most euphemism research uses traditional linguistic methods, some recent studies have introduced computational approaches. Zhu, Wang, Ren, & Jurafsky (2021) developed an unsupervised model to detect euphemisms used by fringe online groups to evade censorship, while Hu, Shi, Wei, & Qiu (2025) created a multimodal model (KOM-EI) that identifies euphemistic language through text, image, and audio. These studies shed light on how euphemisms evolve in digital spaces to bypass algorithmic moderation. However, they do not explore the pragmatic and culturally grounded use of euphemism in indigenous spoken languages. The present study bridges this gap by focusing on the lexico-pragmatic use of euphemism in Gĩgĩcũgũ, using naturalistic data and speaker insights to capture its sociocultural depth.

A pragmatic analysis of euphemisms in Ghanaian English media shows how speakers use them to navigate taboos, uphold politeness, and preserve face in socially sensitive contexts such as death, sex, and politics. Ngula (2016), grounding his study in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Grice's Cooperative Principle, emphasizes that

euphemism is not merely a lexical substitution but a culturally rooted communicative strategy. This perspective aligned with the present study, which explored euphemistic expressions among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers in domains like circumcision, childbirth, sex and relationships, weddings, and church activities. Ngula's work offered a valuable comparative framework that supported the lexico-pragmatic approach by highlighting the interplay between language, culture, and context. Building on this foundation, the present study investigated how Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers employ euphemism to achieve similar pragmatic goals such as mitigating face-threatening acts, conforming to sociocultural expectations, and maintaining social harmony, while also revealed the unique linguistic and cultural patterns that shape euphemistic usage in their specific context.

Tchieche (2012) examines euphemisms in the Akan language, particularly in taboo areas like sex, death, and childbirth, focusing on both lexical substitution and pragmatic motivation. While the study aligned with the present research in its thematic and analytical focus, it did not consider dialectal variation or the use of euphemisms in naturally occurring discourse during specific social events. The current study filled this gap by offering a lexico-pragmatic analysis of euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of Gĩkũyũ, using data from naturally delivered speech and focus group discussions, and extending the scope to culturally significant contexts such as circumcision, diseases, weddings, and church activities.

The use of euphemisms to maintain social harmony in culturally sensitive areas such as sex, death, and politics is addressed in Njoroge's (2014) study of standard Gĩkũyũ. His research provides semantic and pragmatic insights into how speakers navigate taboo subjects through indirectness. While offering a strong base for understanding euphemism in Gĩkũyũ, it did not consider dialectal variations or naturally occurring speech in diverse social contexts. This study addressed those limitations by examining euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, using real-life interactions and focus group data from domains like childbirth and religious life.

Euphemism formation and morphological patterns are the focus of Ndung'u's (2011) contribution, which sheds light on the linguistic creativity behind euphemistic

expressions in Gĩkũyũ. His findings bolstered the lexical analysis aspect of this study, especially in identifying trends in word choice. However, Ndung'u did not examine the pragmatic dimensions or everyday usage of euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, which this current research addressed.

Gachanja (2006) conducted a pragmatic analysis of euphemisms in Gĩkũyũ, particularly in the domains of sex and death. Her study shows how speakers avoid direct reference to sensitive topics, which aligned with the goals of this research. It provides useful analytical approaches for examining euphemism in culturally sensitive areas. However, her work did not include the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect or a wide range of social events like circumcision, child birth, church events, sex and relationships, which this study covered giving a more comprehensive picture.

The function of euphemisms in professional health settings is explored in Karanja's (2010) study of Kikuyu-speaking medical personnel and patients. His study reveals how euphemisms are used to navigate sensitive health-related conversations, especially those involving reproductive health and terminal illness. It contributes to the understanding of euphemism as a pragmatic tool in professional settings, which informed this study's exploration of politeness and indirectness. However, Karanja's focus was limited to clinical environments and standard Gĩkũyũ, while the present research addressed euphemism use in community-based, informal contexts within the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect.

Gendered euphemism in traditional narratives is examined in Wambui's (2015) work on Gĩkũyũ folktales, where indirect language conveys moral teachings and addresses taboo themes. Her study provides insight into how euphemism reflects cultural norms and gender dynamics in traditional narratives. It informed this study by offering a cultural and symbolic understanding of euphemism use within Gĩkũyũ communities. Nonetheless, her work focuses on literary texts and does not analyze naturally occurring spoken discourse or dialectal variation, which this study addressed through real-life data and a focus on the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect.

Mwangi (2013) conducted a sociolinguistic study on language and taboo in Kikamba, focusing on how speakers use euphemisms to discuss culturally sensitive topics. His study is useful in illustrating how euphemistic language varies across social contexts and reflects the values of the community. This research provides a comparative framework for examining how euphemism functions as a face-saving strategy within Kenyan Bantu languages. However, Mwangi did not focus on Gĩkũyũ or its dialects, nor did he explore lexico-pragmatic elements in naturally occurring conversations, a gap this study filled through a focused analysis of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect across specific social domains.

Despite a growing body of research on euphemism, little attention has been given to its role in minoritized and under-documented dialects like Gĩgĩcũgũ, spoken in parts of Kenya. This study addresses that oversight by analyzing how euphemistic expressions in Gĩgĩcũgũ reflect broader pragmatic, cultural, and sociolinguistic values. Unlike prior work centered on dominant languages and institutional discourse, this research explores how euphemism functions in informal, community-based interactions, managing taboo, reinforcing etiquette, and navigating power. It also highlights how euphemisms and dysphemisms are not just linguistic tools but are embedded in social structures and cultural norms, sustaining community identity and social harmony.

2.10 Theoretical Framework

This study examined the use of euphemism in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect through the lens of Politeness Theory, as developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The theory provides a practical and conceptual framework for understanding how speakers manage social harmony through indirect or softened language, especially when addressing sensitive or taboo topics. Given that euphemism plays a significant role in negotiating respect, social order, and cultural values, the Politeness Theory was particularly suited for analyzing the data collected in this research.

2.10.1 Politeness Theory

Politeness Theory centers on the idea of “face,” which refers to a person’s self-image as it is presented and negotiated during social interactions. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), everyone has two types of face needs: positive face, the desire to be

liked, approved of, and included and negative face, the desire to act freely without imposition or restriction. In everyday communication, certain speech acts can threaten these face needs. These are known as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) and include behaviors like giving criticism, making demands, disagreeing, or discussing sensitive topics such as death, sex, or illness. Such acts risk disrupting social harmony or offending others, which is why speakers often use politeness strategies to soften the impact. Euphemisms are a prime example of these strategies; by replacing direct or potentially harsh expressions with milder alternatives, they protect both the speaker's and listener's face, showing sensitivity to social and emotional contexts.

In this study, Politeness Theory was applied to analyze the euphemistic expressions collected from Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers. During transcription and coding, euphemisms were categorized based on whether they protected positive or negative face and the type of FTA they helped mitigate. For example, euphemisms related to culturally taboo topics like death or sexuality typically reflected negative politeness strategies, where speakers avoided imposing discomfort on their listeners. On the other hand, euphemisms used during community events or religious ceremonies often embodied positive politeness, reinforcing group solidarity and mutual respect. The theory provided a useful lens to understand how social context, power dynamics, and interpersonal relationships influenced speakers' choices of euphemistic expressions. Elders, for instance, tended to use more indirect language than younger people, reflecting social hierarchy and respect norms. Differences also appeared in mixed-gender versus same-gender settings, revealing how cultural expectations shape language use. By linking euphemistic language to its pragmatic functions, such as minimizing offense, avoiding taboo, maintaining decorum, or expressing empathy, the theory enriched the analysis and connected linguistic patterns to broader Kikuyu social values.

Politeness Theory's strengths lie in its clear, systematic approach to understanding how people navigate sensitive communication, considering both interpersonal respect and social roles. Although originally based on Western contexts, it has proven flexible enough to adapt to the Kikuyu setting, allowing euphemisms to be seen not just as linguistic substitutions but as culturally meaningful acts of politeness that uphold respect, harmony, and order. The focus on social consequences of language use aligns

well with the study's goal of exploring euphemism as a tool for managing social relationships and reinforcing cultural norms.

However, the theory is not without limitations. It can sometimes assume that all cultures interpret face and politeness similarly, which is not always the case. To address this, the study integrated cultural context by allowing participant explanations and local perspectives to guide interpretation, avoiding the imposition of external meanings. Another challenge is that the theory often focuses on the speaker's intentions and may overlook how listeners interpret messages or how politeness plays out dynamically in interaction. To counter this, the researcher used member checking and triangulation, engaging participants in clarifying euphemism meanings, which added depth and reliability to the analysis. Additionally, because Politeness Theory emphasizes verbal communication, it may miss important non-verbal cues like tone, gestures, or setting. This gap was filled by closely observing and annotating natural speech recordings, including paralinguistic features, to capture the full richness of politeness in real-life conversations.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Location of the Study

The research was carried out in Rung'eto sub-location, Ngariamama Location, Kirinyaga East Sub-county, Kirinyaga County, Kenya. This is the home of the native Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers (Njoroge, 2014) who were resourceful in providing the data necessary for this research that sought to document the Gĩgĩcũgũ euphemisms. Their warmth and willingness to share made the research not only possible, but deeply meaningful.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the use of euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. This design allowed for in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur, making it suitable for gathering rich, contextual data (Creswell, 2014). A purposive sample was selected to represent broader patterns of euphemistic usage within the speech community, consistent with Oso and Onen's (2008) assertion that descriptive surveys are suitable for examining specific linguistic practices.

The design was chosen for its adaptability, clarity, and capacity to incorporate diverse perspectives, which is essential in examining culturally embedded language use. Law and Lodge (1984) support the application of descriptive designs in qualitative research for their ability to capture complex social meanings. The approach facilitated the collection of detailed, context-sensitive data through Focus Group Discussions and recording of natural speech, providing insights into how euphemistic expressions function within different social contexts.

3.3 Target Population

The target population refers to the entire set of elements that a researcher aims study or generalize about (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). In this study, the target population comprised euphemistic words and expressions used in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect of the Kikuyu language. These euphemisms were particularly relevant in social contexts such as circumcision, childbirth, sex and relationships, church activities, and weddings within the Gĩgĩcũgũ speaking community. The study focused on euphemistic lexical

items commonly used by fluent native speakers of Gĩgĩcũgũ as they possess extensive knowledge of traditional and contemporary euphemistic expressions.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique widely used in qualitative research, to select participants who possessed deep, context-specific knowledge of euphemism use in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. The participants were native speakers from the Rung'eto region of Kirinyaga County, Kenya, an area chosen deliberately for its preservation of traditional linguistic features and minimal influence from urban hybrid dialects like Sheng. This region's strong cultural practices also provide a rich context for euphemistic expressions linked to rituals, taboos, and social customs. Eligible participants were those born and raised in Rung'eto, spoke Gĩgĩcũgũ as their first language, were familiar with local cultural norms, and were aged 25 years or older to ensure sufficient exposure to euphemistic usage in social settings. Initial informal conversations, involving open-ended questions in the dialect, served as a screening process to assess linguistic fluency and cultural competence, focusing on participants' ability to use, interpret, and explain euphemisms appropriately.

Following selection, eight Focus Group Discussions were conducted, each comprising six participants and totaling 48 individuals. The groups were stratified by age and gender to capture variations in euphemism use across generations and social lines. Participants discussed euphemisms related to social domains such as birth, initiation ceremonies, marriage, religion, illness, and death. Additionally, natural speech was recorded in everyday settings, such as church meetings, communal gatherings, and domestic conversations, to capture spontaneous euphemistic language. While the participant count was 48, the primary unit of analysis was the euphemistic expressions themselves; a total of 212 expressions were collected from both focus groups and natural speech, then transcribed, translated, and analyzed for linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic features. Data collection continued until saturation was reached after the seventh focus group, where no new euphemisms or significant variations emerged. The eighth group confirmed the findings without introducing new data, indicating a comprehensive dataset. The researcher extended data collection briefly to ensure reliability, with the absence of novel expressions affirming that the study had

thoroughly captured the range and types of euphemisms common in the community, resulting in a rich, culturally grounded dataset aligned with the study's qualitative objective.

3.5 Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through fieldwork in Rung'eto, a rural area in Kirinyaga County where the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect is actively spoken and retains many traditional features. The researcher immersed herself in the community and gathered information from key social settings such as homesteads, churches, and public events. Specifically, eight homesteads, four churches, and six communal gatherings, including weddings, fundraisers, and circumcision-related events, were visited. These sites were purposefully chosen for their potential to yield naturally occurring euphemistic expressions related to culturally sensitive topics.

Before collecting data, the researcher explained the purpose of the study both verbally and in writing and obtained informed consent from all participants. The focus was on observing and recording natural communication, allowing euphemisms to arise organically during conversations about themes such as childbirth, sexuality, illness, circumcision, death, and spirituality. To complement these observations, eight Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held across homesteads and communal spaces. Each FGD had six participants, making a total of 48, and was guided by open-ended prompts that encouraged the sharing of commonly used euphemisms in sensitive contexts. Participants varied in age and gender, allowing the study to capture generational and social variation in euphemism use.

Additionally, twelve audio recordings were made of spontaneous conversations in churches, homes, and public settings. These recordings provided insight into how euphemisms function in real-life, unscripted interactions. All recordings were made with participants' knowledge and consent. The researcher manually transcribed the audio data in the original Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect and translated it into English, carefully preserving the cultural tone and meaning of each expression. Where relevant, speaker tone, situational context, and non-verbal cues were noted to enhance interpretation.

3.6 Research Instruments

To collect data on euphemistic expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, this study employed two research instruments: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and recordings of natural speech. These methods enabled the researcher to gather rich, contextually relevant data on the lexico-pragmatic interpretation of euphemisms. Together, they provided a comprehensive understanding of how euphemisms function within the Gĩgĩcũgũ community.

3.6.1 Focus Group Discussions

FGDs was conducted with fluent native speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, who possess extensive knowledge of euphemistic expressions used in everyday communication. total of eight groups were organized, each comprising of six participants resulting in 48 participants in total. Participants were purposefully selected based on their linguistic competence and familiarity with the dialect, ensuring rich and contextually grounded data. The discussions explored the use of euphemisms in various socio-cultural contexts such as circumcision, childbirth, diseases, sex and relationships, church activities, and weddings. The researcher served as the moderator, introduced relevant topics and guided the conversation in a natural and interactive manner to encourage free expression. The use of FGDs as a data collection method is justified by their effectiveness in eliciting nuanced language use and shared cultural meanings in a group setting (Krueger & Casey, 2015), making them particularly suitable for exploring euphemistic language within a specific speech community.

3.6.2 Recording of Natural Speech

To capture euphemisms as they are used in everyday communication, the study involved recording naturally occurring conversations in appropriate social settings. These recordings helped identify euphemistic expressions in their authentic usage, providing insights into their lexical, semantic, and pragmatic aspects as in *appendix 3*. The recordings were conducted in informal contexts such as homesteads, churches, and communal gatherings, where speakers are more likely to express themselves naturally. All participants were informed beforehand and their consent obtained to ensure ethical compliance and the reliability of the data collected.

3.7 Validity Test

Validity in this study was rooted in the goal of accurately capturing how euphemisms are used and understood within the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, not just in theory but in lived, everyday contexts. To achieve this, the researcher emphasized both content and face validity through practical, community-grounded strategies. The data collection instruments, particularly the FGD guide and transcription framework, were reviewed by academic supervisors, linguistic peers, and experts in Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, whose input led to refinements that ensured the tools captured a wide range of euphemistic expression, including in less frequently discussed domains like spirituality and illness. Face validity was further supported through pilot testing with native speakers, whose feedback helped adjust question wording and flow to be more culturally intuitive. In the field, triangulation strengthened validity by cross-checking euphemisms gathered from FGDs, natural speech recordings, and participant clarifications, allowing the researcher to confirm which expressions were truly embedded in everyday use. Importantly, meanings were not imposed by the researcher but clarified through ongoing participant input, ensuring that the interpretations remained faithful to how speakers themselves experienced and understood the language.

3.8 Reliability Test

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of both the data and the methods used to collect it (Sekeran, 2003). This study ensured reliability through a series of deliberate strategies applied across all stages of the research process. A standardized Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide was used in all eight groups, allowing consistent prompts and reducing researcher bias, while natural speech recordings were conducted in comparable communal settings such as homesteads, churches, and public gatherings, where euphemisms typically occur. Transcription reliability was strengthened through a rigorous process: the researcher, a native Gĩgĩcũgũ speaker, transcribed all recordings and reviewed them multiple times for consistency, while a second native speaker cross-checked a sample, especially for culturally nuanced or idiomatic expressions. This peer verification helped ensure that interpretations reflected shared linguistic norms rather than individual bias. Additionally, euphemisms identified in FGDs were compared with those from natural speech to confirm recurring usage patterns and cultural embeddedness. These combined

efforts ensured that the findings were not only consistent across participants and settings but could also be reliably reproduced in similar sociolinguistic contexts.

3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis

This qualitative linguistic study used a descriptive approach to analyze the lexico-pragmatic features of euphemisms used by native Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers. Rather than focusing on numerical data, the analysis emphasized in-depth interpretation of meaning, usage, and context in naturally occurring discourse. Data analysis involved collection and reporting, with euphemistic expressions transcribed and categorized based on their function, context, and pragmatic strategies. These categories corresponded to social domains such as birth, diseases, circumcision, marriage, sex and relationships, church activities, and death. Each expression was examined within its linguistic and socio-cultural context, guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, focusing on how euphemisms mitigate face-threatening acts and uphold norms of politeness. Findings were presented thematically, illustrated with direct excerpts from the data, and interpreted in relation to their cultural significance, linguistic function, and pragmatic intent, highlighting how euphemism helps navigate sensitive topics and reflect community values in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, the researcher adhered to recognized ethical standards to ensure the protection of all participants and the integrity of the research process. The researcher obtained an introductory letter (Appendix 5) and approval was obtained from the Graduate School of Chuka University. The Chuka University Ethics Review Committee (Appendix 6) provided oversight and guidance on ethical matters throughout the research. The researcher also secured research clearance from the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) in accordance with the NACOSTI Act, 2013 (Appendix 7). Informed consent was obtained from all participants (Appendix 1). Respondents were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The researcher ensured that participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and potential risks of the study before they consent. Confidentiality was strictly maintained. Data collected was anonymized to protect the identity of respondents, and

any personal information was securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. No identifiable information was included in the final report or any publications resulting from the research. To uphold academic integrity, the researcher avoided all forms of plagiarism. All sources used were properly cited, and original work was maintained throughout the research process. The final thesis was subjected to plagiarism detection software to confirm authenticity and originality.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN EUPHEMISED EXPRESSIONS IN THE GIGICUGU DIALECT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect serve as politeness strategies, especially in culturally sensitive contexts like initiation and marriage. Drawing on Politeness Theory, particularly Brown and Levinson's model of face-saving acts, it highlights how speakers use euphemism to maintain social harmony and protect face. This analysis is further supported by Scollon and Scollon's perspective, which links politeness to social roles and relational distance, as well as by Fraser's typology, which categorizes different approaches to politeness in communication.

4.2 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness plays a central role in minimizing the risk of face loss in communication among speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. It involves the deliberate avoidance of direct references to topics considered uncomfortable, sensitive, or socially inappropriate. As Qadi (2009) noted, speakers tend to avoid lexical items associated with taboo subjects, even though such terms exist within the language. Their limited use in everyday conversation reflects a shared awareness of their potential to cause discomfort or social tension.

Politeness constitutes a fundamental aspect of communicative competence, developed through processes of language socialization (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Within their framework, "negative face" refers to an individual's desire for autonomy and non-interference. When conversational topics threaten this sense of personal space, such as references to death, bodily functions, or social transgressions, speakers often employ indirect language to mitigate the impact.

This section examined how Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers utilized negative politeness strategies to navigate culturally sensitive interactions. These strategies served not only to maintain social equilibrium but also to uphold the listener's dignity, particularly in contexts where direct speech might have undermined interpersonal harmony. Such careful

linguistic choices reflect a deep cultural awareness of social boundaries and a desire to avoid imposition or offense.

4.2.1 Sexuality and Child Bearing

Childbearing and by extension, human sexuality remains one of the most valued yet culturally sensitive subjects within many African societies. While its biological importance in the continuation of life is unquestionable, conversations around sexuality are often veiled in discretion, guided by long-standing cultural norms that discourages open discussion. Pinker (2007) attributes this sensitivity to a range of socio-cultural concerns, including the potential risks associated with sexual activity, such as emotional vulnerability, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, or the moral implications of infidelity. These factors contributed to a broader social tendency to treat sexuality as a private, even taboo, topic.

Pinker also highlights a gendered aspect of the usage of taboo words, pointing out that males are more likely than women to discuss such subjects in public. This disparity is frequently influenced by varying social positions and expectations. The majority of euphemism sexuality-related idioms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, the study's emphasis, were provided by female speakers, possibly as a result of their need to preserve their modesty and emotional distance from overt or explicit language.

Building on Al-Qadi's (2009) classification of politeness into positive and negative forms, the study found that Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers employ both strategies. Positive politeness is used to affirm shared values and build rapport, while negative politeness serves to avoid offense and reduce social imposition. Notably, the data revealed a stronger reliance on negative politeness, especially in contexts involving sexuality, where the risk of face-threatening acts was particularly high.

4.2.1.1 Erection

The direct term for erection, *gukia*, is largely avoided in everyday communication, as it is considered taboo within this community. In line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, speakers employ euphemisms to mitigate face-threatening acts associated with discussing sexual matters. For men, euphemisms commonly used as

indirect substitutes to erection are: *kuhanda* (to wake), *gũkiria* (to wake), or *kũratha* (to shoot)- which is metaphorically used.

Similarly, for women, expressions used in formal and polite communication regarding erection were employed. They reflect both negative politeness strategies (to avoid offense) and the cultural norms that shape gendered discourse around sexuality. They include: *ũrugari* (feeling hot), *mũruki* (smell), or *kuimba* (to swell).

4.2.1.2 Pregnancy and Childbearing

When referring to conception, the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect revealed further linguistic sensitivity. While the terms *kũgia nda* (to get a stomach), *ihu* (pregnant), *nda* (stomach) are understood, they are viewed as offensive. More socially acceptable alternatives include *gũtetheka* (to be helped), *kũrathimwa* (to be blessed). Phrases like *ee na nda* (she has a stomach) are rarely used in polite discourse. Instead, expressions such as *nĩ mũrito* (she is heavy) or *nĩ mũkuu* (she has carried), *ni mubũnu* (has eaten enough) are preferred, reflecting a continued reliance on negative politeness.

The pattern persists during childbirth. The term *gũciara* (to give birth) is typically avoided, especially by family members or in formal settings. Euphemistic alternatives include: *kũgĩa mwana* (to bear a child), *kũbewa mwana* (to be given a baby), *gũtetheka* (to be assisted), *kũrathimwa* (to be blessed), *gũtanahirwo* (be blessed), or *kwĩbingũra* (to open oneself).

Afterbirth is also subject to euphemism. The word *thigiri* (placenta) is replaced with *nyomba ya mwana* (baby's house), a more culturally acceptable term that avoids triggering FTAs. The study confirmed that negative politeness is the preferred strategy for discussing afterbirth among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, due to the cultural sensitivities surrounding the topic.

4.2.1.3 Human Reproductive Anatomy

In discussing human reproductive anatomy, direct terms are almost never used. Male genitalia are referred to with metaphors. *Mũthino/muthiita* (penis) becomes: *mũcuthi* (tail), *mũtĩ* ("stick/tree"), *cuuma* (metal), *indo ciake* (his things), *mũcinga* (gun), *gikingi*

(post), *itimū* (spear), *mūgwi* (arrow), *karamu* (pen), *cindano* (needle), *njoka* (snake), *ūrūme* (manhood), *kanyamoo/kinyamoo* (small thing/big thing), or *gīkonde* (foreskin). The testicles, *ntheke/nyee/heke/ndendere* is replaced with: *matumbi* (eggs) or *mīrigo* (goods).

For female genitalia, *mbīnī/kanyee/kiino* (vagina) is euphemized with: *nyamū* (animal), *mūgūnda* (garden), *kībuyu* (thermos flask), *mūgūnda wa kīanda* (the lower garden), *indocia mūtumia* (woman's things), *njīra ya ūciari* (birth canal), *mwanya* (opening), *mūtaro* (trench), *ngwacī* (sweetpotato), *murīo* (sweetness), *kanyūngū* (pot), *kīthima* (well), *kībīngo kīa mūcī* (gate to home) or *irio* (food). The clitoris, *kang'ura/kagego*, therefore becomes: *mboco* (bean) or *karubia* (horn).

Pubic hair, *huyo*, is euphemized with *njūiri* (hair) or *guoya* (fur). Buttocks, *matina*, is often replaced with the politer variants: *ndūnu*, *thutha* (behind) or *njīkarīro* (the sitting apparatus). Also, *nyondo* (breast) is substituted with: *kīthūri* (chest), *kīthūri kīnene* (chest big), or *kīthūri kīnini* (chest small).

These substitutions reflect cultural taboos and an emphasis on maintaining social propriety. Consistent with Qadi's (2009) definition, these euphemistic practices exemplify negative politeness, avoiding explicit, potentially pejorative language to preserve social cohesion and prevent discomfort. In the context of the Gikuyu culture, such linguistic choices serve to mitigate FTAs and reflect deeply held communal values regarding decorum, gender, and respect in communication.

To better illustrate the range and function of euphemistic expressions related to sexuality and childbearing, participant insights were organized into thematic categories, as shown in table 1. The remarks presented highlight not only the linguistic creativity of Gīgīcūgū speakers but also the underlying cultural logic that governs polite speech. Each euphemism reflects a deliberate attempt to navigate socially delicate topics while upholding communal norms of modesty, respect, and emotional sensitivity. The table further demonstrates how negative politeness is consistently employed to soften direct references, reduce face-threatening acts, and preserve interpersonal harmony during such conversations.

Table 1: Euphemisms for Sexuality and Childbearing

Theme	Participant Remark	Interpretation	Politeness Strategy
Erection	“The mention of <i>gũkia</i> is a taboo. We prefer the use of the terms <i>gũkia</i> , <i>kuhanda</i> , <i>kuratha</i> in men and <i>urugari</i> , <i>muruki</i> , <i>kuimba</i> in women.”	Euphemisms are used by both genders in avoidance of FTAs.	Negative politeness – avoidance of FTA
Conception	“You avoid saying <i>kugia nda</i> . It sounds rude. Say <i>nĩ mūrīto</i> or <i>nĩ-mũkuu</i> instead.”	Terms like <i>pregnant</i> are euphemized to avoid bodily connotations and shame.	Negative Politeness – respects listener’s emotional boundaries.
Childbirth	“Even <i>gũciara</i> sounds too blunt. We prefer <i>kũbewa mwana</i> or <i>kũrathimwa</i> .”	The act of giving birth is referred to indirectly, even by family members.	Negative Politeness – indirectness to show respect.
Reproductive Anatomy	“For a man’s parts we say <i>cuuma</i> , not <i>mũthino</i> and for women, <i>mũgũnda</i> or <i>nyamũ</i> .”	Euphemisms reflect social taboos and the desire to avoid sexual embarrassment.	Negative Politeness – mitigates face-threatening acts.

4.2.2 Body Effluvia

According to Watts (2003), encounters that conform to dominant sociocultural standards give rise to the communicative practice of politeness. Direct references to body excretions, including urine and feces, are often avoided in public conversation or in socially sensitive situations in many cultures. This research on the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect revealed that speakers seldom use the specific names of various body processes. In order to respect their interlocutors' personal limits and sensibilities, speakers intentionally steer clear or potentially objectionable terminology. This linguistic conduct was viewed as an example of negative politeness.

4.2.2.1 Euphemisms for Toilets and Defecation

The term *kĩoro* (toilet) was regarded as impolite or vulgar by speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, and is therefore rarely used in public or polite conversation. To maintain decorum and social propriety, the following euphemistic expressions were used: *nyomba ya gwitethia* (house to help oneself), *nyomba ya bata* (house of need), *nyomba*

ya kabinda (house of call), *nyomba ya mūndu ūmwe* (house of one person), *nyomba ya kabinda* (the house of need), *obisi* (office).

Brown and Levinson (1987) classify this form of politeness whereby a speaker deliberately avoids the use of taboo language to protect the interlocutor's face as an instance of negative politeness. Among speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, references to biological functions, particularly excretion, were observed to elicit discomfort and pose a threat to the hearer's face needs. For example, the lexical item *kūmĩa* (to defecate), *mai* (feaces), are considered inappropriate for direct usage in everyday conversation. As a result, speakers tend to substitute them with euphemistic expressions such as: *gwĩtethia* (to help oneself), *kuna mwĩgua* (to cut a thorn), *kūuna* (to cut it), *kabinda kanene* (long call), *kuthi bata* (Going for a need), *gutema muti* (to cut a tree), or *ngindo* (feaces).

4.2.2.2 Euphemisms for Urination

The term *kūthuguma* (to urinate) is similarly considered impolite in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. The study revealed that this term is rarely used in polite conversation, instead, speakers preferred euphemistic alternatives such as: *gūcucu* (to urinate), *kūmatua* (to spit), *gūtua mata* (to spit saliva), or *kabinda kanini* (small call). Notably, within the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, there is a striking euphemism in which urine is metaphorically referred to as saliva in such expressions.

4.2.2.3 Gendered Euphemisms for Urination

The findings further shed light on the use of gender-specific euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, reflecting both linguistic nuance and cultural perceptions of gender roles. For men, the euphemism *kūrūgama* (to stand) is commonly used, acknowledging the typical male posture during urination. In contrast, women are associated with the expression *kuna ĩru* (to bend the knee), which aligns with the squatting or crouching position often assumed by females. These euphemisms not only serve to maintain politeness but also subtly reinforce traditional gender norms through language. This distinction highlights how even bodily functions are linguistically shaped by societal expectations and gendered behavior.

4.2.2.4 Euphemisms for Flatulence

As per the data collected, observation was made regarding the Gĩgĩcũgũ euphemism for farting/flatulence referred to as *kũthuria/kũthiota/ndore* in the dialect. This study revealed that the terms are hardly used in polite conversations. Instead, the speakers preferred more acceptable terms which include: *kũthũkia riera* (spoiling the air) or *riera rĩũru* (bad air). This linguistic shift illustrates the application of a negative politeness strategy, where indirectness is employed to avoid imposing on the listener's sense of dignity. By softening the language, speakers demonstrate deference and maintain social harmony, particularly when addressing sensitive bodily functions that may otherwise threaten the hearer's negative face, their desire to be respected upon.

4.2.2.5 Euphemisms for Orgasm

In regard to orgasm, the data showed that *guitukwo* (orgasm) is a taboo. The speakers prefer socially acceptable terminologies which include: *guita* (to pour) or *gũka* (come). The mention of *ubai/njokoyo* (semen) is usually tabooed therefore euphemized with: *hinya wa urume* (the strength of a man) or *mbegu cia arũme* (the seeds of men). These alternatives reflect the cultural restraint surrounding sexual expression.

4.2.2.6 Euphemisms for Menstruation

The speakers stated that it is taboo to refer to menstruation directly. *Kura* (bleed) is a taboo term that is avoided and replaced with euphemistic words like: *mweri* (moon), *mithenya ya atumia* (days of women), *machiru* (name of woman, Wanjiru), *kabinda ka mweri* (period the month), *kuona mweri* (see the moon), *ageni a mutumia* (the visitors for woman), *ageni a mweri* (monthly visitors), *ibinda riu ria mweri* (that period of the month), *gucererwo* (to be visited), *mweri* (moon), *kuona* (to see), or *kuona mweri* (to see the moon). These euphemisms not only reflect cultural sensitivity around menstruation but also serve to protect dignity and maintain social decorum in everyday conversations.

4.2.2.7 Euphemisms for Vomiting

References to bodily functions such as vomiting are often treated with a high degree of linguistic sensitivity across cultures, and the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect is no exception. In this dialect, the term *gũtabika* (to vomit) is regarded as impolite and is rarely used in formal or respectful conversation. Instead, speakers frequently employ euphemistic

alternatives such as *kūruta kiria ngurite* (to remove what I had eaten) or *kūruta kiria kiuma nda* (to remove what was in the stomach).

These expressions serve not only to mitigate the discomfort associated with direct reference to bodily functions but also reflect a broader cultural emphasis on maintaining interpersonal respect and modesty in communication. This avoidance of direct terminology aligns with Goffman's (1967) concept of "face," in which individuals seek to uphold a positive social image in interactional contexts. Additionally, the use of euphemism in this context illustrates Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of negative politeness, wherein indirectness and linguistic mitigation are employed to reduce face-threatening acts and avoid imposing on the hearer. Thus, the preference for euphemistic language when discussing vomiting can be understood as a strategic application of politeness principles aimed at preserving social harmony and minimizing potential embarrassment.

Information in Table 2 illustrates how speakers in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect favor euphemisms for body effluvia over direct terms to maintain cultural norms of modesty and respect. Participant insights reveal that these choices are grounded in social sensitivity rather than mere stylistic variation. The use of metaphor and gendered language further supports the role of euphemism as a politeness strategy rooted in face-saving practices. The following data in table 2 provides examples that illustrate this nuanced communicative practice.

Table 2: Euphemisms for Body Effluvia in the Gĩgĩcũgũ Dialect

Theme	Participant Remarks	Interpretation	Politeness Strategy
Toilet Terminologies	“We don’t say <i>kĩoro</i> directly, it is too crude. We just say <i>nyomba ya gwĩtethia</i> .”	Direct mention of “toilet” (<i>kĩoro</i>) is vulgar and avoided. Euphemisms like <i>house to help oneself</i> are more polite.	Negative Politeness – avoids face-threatening acts (FTAs).
Defecation	“You can’t just say <i>kũmĩa</i> in front of people! Say <i>kabinda</i> or <i>kũuna</i> .”	Open mention of <i>kũmĩa</i> (to defecate) is socially unacceptable; euphemisms downplay the unpleasantness.	Negative Politeness – uses indirect speech to maintain decorum.
Urination	“We say <i>gũtua mata</i> or <i>gũcucu</i> instead of <i>kũthuguma</i> , especially around elders.”	Avoiding <i>kũthuguma</i> helps preserve social harmony. The substitution of “saliva” (<i>mata</i>) is metaphorical.	Negative Politeness – metaphor helps reduce discomfort.
Gender-specific Euphemisms	“Men use <i>kũrũgama</i> , women say <i>kũna iru</i> . It depends on how you urinate.”	Euphemisms are not only polite but gender-specific, showing social awareness and respect.	Negative Politeness – respects gender norms and privacy.
Flatulence	“We say <i>kũthũkia riera</i> (spoiling the air) or <i>riera rĩũru</i> (bad air) which is respectable and polite instead of <i>kũthuria</i> or <i>kũthiota</i> ”	The use of <i>kũthuria</i> or <i>kũthiota</i> is socially unacceptable and portrays unpleasantness	Negative Politeness – avoids face-
Menstruation	“We don’t say <i>kura</i> (to bleed) directly, it’s too impolite, we just say, <i>mweri</i> (moon), <i>mithenya ya atumia</i> (days of women), <i>machiru</i> , <i>kabinda ka mweri</i> (period of the month), <i>kuona mweri</i> (see the moon), <i>ageni a mutumia</i> (the visitors to woman), <i>ageni a mweri</i> (monthly visitors), <i>ibinda riu ria mweri</i> (that period of the month), <i>gucererwa</i> (to be visited), or <i>kuona</i> (to see)	The use of <i>kura</i> (to bleed) is socially unacceptable, it is considered a taboo and unpleasant therefore substituted with more polite words.	Negative Politeness
Vomiting	“We do not say <i>gũtabika</i> (vomiting) directly, it is too vulgar. We instead say <i>kũruta kiria ngurite</i> (to remove what I had eaten) or <i>kũruta kiria kiuma nda</i> (to remove what was in the stomach)”	The use of these euphemisms downplays the unpleasantness.	Negative politeness

4.2.3 Diseases

The data collected revealed that euphemisms play a crucial role in how Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers handle socially sensitive topics. Among the most significant areas where euphemistic language is employed are discussions related to mental illness and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as HIV/AIDS and gonorrhea. These subjects are culturally marked by shame, stigma, and discomfort, and as a result, direct references are often avoided in everyday communication.

4.2.3.1 Mental Illness

Participants in the FGDs consistently emphasized that terms such as *mũgũrũki* (mad person) and *mũndũ wa ngoma* (person of satan) are considered disrespectful and are rarely used unless in extreme anger or judgment. Instead, speakers opt for less direct, more metaphorical expressions that convey the idea of mental instability without sounding harsh or accusatory. Commonly used euphemisms include: *kũrogota maratathi* (to collect the papers), *gũta mbau* (to throw away a board), *kurũta nguo* (to remove clothes), *kwĩariria* (to talk to oneself), *gũta laini* (to get off track), *kũthũka kiongo* (to lose the head), *kũthũka* (to lose control), *gũchanganyikirwo* (to be confused), *murĩmu wa kiongo* (illness of the head), or *kũrogota takataka* (to collect trash). These expressions are often used with caution and empathy, especially when the subject of the conversation is present or known to the speaker, reflecting a strong cultural emphasis on preserving dignity and social harmony.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory helps explain this linguistic behavior. The use of euphemisms in this context aligns with negative politeness strategies, which aim to avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs) by minimizing imposition and showing respect for the listener's personal and social identity. By using indirect language, speakers demonstrated sensitivity to the emotional weight of such topics and the potential consequences of speaking too bluntly. In some cases, off-record strategies are used, where the meaning is implied rather than stated explicitly, allowing the listener to infer the topic without the speaker taking full charge for naming it.

4.2.3.2 HIV/AIDS

The avoidance of direct language was highly evident when discussing sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV/AIDS. Participants in both FGDs and natural conversation recordings rarely used the term *mũkingo*, a word often linked with shame, fear, and social exclusion. Instead, they preferred terms such as: *kagũnyo* (worm), *mũrimu* (illness), *mũrũaru* (the unwell one), *mũrimu wa thirikari* (government disease), *kimemendi* (that thing / the destroyer), *mũrimu uyu* (this disease), *homa* (common cold), or *mutinu wa uriri/gitanda* (bed accident). These phrases not only reduce the emotional charge of the conversation but also allow for the expression of concern or inquiry without causing embarrassment to the person affected or those listening.

4.2.3.3 Gonorrhea

This disease is stigmatized. It is often referred to with euphemisms like: *gichununu*, *gatego* (trap), *mũrimu wa gatagati* (disease of the center), *mũrimu wa thiri* (the secret disease), *gĩchũĩ* (itch), *irĩa* (milk), or *mũrimu wa ũmamari* (disease of promiscuity). These terms, derived from symptoms or cultural associations, allow speakers to talk about the condition indirectly, especially in mixed company or formal settings. The euphemisms also serve as a coded language among peers, helping maintain social boundaries and avoid moral judgment.

The data in table 3 shows that euphemism in Gĩgĩcũgũ diseases is not merely a stylistic feature but a strategic, culturally embedded practice. Through the lens of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, it becomes clear that such language use reflects a collective desire to maintain social balance, protect individual face, and navigate taboo topics with discretion and empathy. The community's rich use of metaphor and indirection revealed not only creativity in language but also a deep awareness of the social impact of words. Consider the data in the following table.

Table 3: Euphemisms for Diseases

Condition	Direct Term	Euphemism Used	Literal Translation	Politeness Strategy	Context of Use
Mental Illness		<i>kũrogota maratathi gũta mbau</i>	to collect the papers	Negative politeness strategies-avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs)	reflecting a strong cultural emphasis on preserving dignity and social harmony.
	<i>mũgũrũki</i> (mad person) <i>mũndũ wa ngoma</i> (person of Satan)	<i>kurũta nguo</i> <i>kwĩairia</i> <i>gũta laini</i> <i>kũthũka kiongo</i> <i>kũthũka</i> <i>gũchanganyikir wa mũrimu</i> wa <i>kiongo</i> <i>kũrogota takataka</i>	to throw away a board to remove clothes to talk to oneself to get off track to lose the head to lose control to be confused illness of the head to collect rubbish		
HIV/AIDS	<i>Mũkingo</i>	<i>Kagũnyo</i>	Worm	Negative politeness	Used in conversations to reduce judgement
		<i>Mũrimu</i> <i>Mũruaru</i>	Illness The sick one	Bald on-record with soft tone	Used when trying to show empathy
		<i>Mũrimu wa thirikari</i>	The government disease	Negative politeness (sarcasm/me taphor)	Found in FGD with older adults
		<i>Kimemendi, Murimu uyu</i>	The destroyer This disease	Off-record strategy	Found in women's FGD
Gonorrhea		<i>Gatego</i>	Gate	Metaphor	Youth-focused FGD
		<i>Gĩchũĩ</i>	Itch	Metonymy	Slang in casual conversations
		<i>Irĩa</i>	Milk	Metaphor	Refers to symptom (discharge)
		<i>Mũrimu wa ũmamari</i>	Disease of Promiscuity	Indirect blame	Used with moral framing

4.2.4 Euphemisms for Sexual Misconduct

Certain terms associated with prostitution and sexual deviance are considered taboo among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers. The direct use of such words in conversation is regarded impolite or socially inappropriate, especially in formal or respectful settings. As such, speakers employ euphemisms to mitigate the negative connotations and avoid face-

threatening acts. The word *mumaraya* (prostitute) is highly tabooed and avoided in polite discourse. Instead, the following euphemisms are used:

kiumbani (one who keeps a woman) referring indirectly to a man who keeps a mistress.

gūtharia – used for a male prostitute, derived from the verb *gūtharia* (to erase or destroy), metaphorically implying destruction or shame.

mūkoma thī – euphemism for an unmarried mother, often used to imply sexual looseness or association with prostitution.

njangiri (the wrongdoer) which is contextually used to refer to a prostitute.

These lexical choices demonstrated the use of negative politeness strategies, as they allowed speakers to discuss morally and culturally sensitive topics without causing embarrassment or offense.

4.2.5 Euphemisms for Poverty

Poverty is a deeply sensitive and socially loaded issue in the Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community, often carrying with it, implications of failure, shame, or exclusion. Direct references to poverty, such as calling someone *mūthini* (a poor person), are generally avoided in polite, formal or public conversation. The term itself is viewed as blunt and potentially humiliating, as it openly categorizes someone by a lack of material means, thereby threatening their social dignity.

In this context, poverty is not only an economic condition but a marker of social vulnerability. Many households in the region experience poverty due to factors such as land fragmentation, unpredictable weather patterns that affect agriculture (a primary livelihood), lack of access to stable employment, and limited educational opportunities. These challenges often result in a cycle of hardship that is difficult to break, and as such, conversations about poverty are approached with caution and sensitivity.

Rather than use the explicit term *mūthini*, speakers prefer euphemistic expressions that highlight temporary or situational lack, rather than permanent identity. For example, phrases like *kwaga mbea* or *kwaga mbia* (to lack money) are commonly used to indicate financial difficulty without labelling the individual as poor. Another expression, *ndena kanyamu* (he/she has nothing), suggests lack in the moment rather than a fixed state of deprivation. These expressions subtly shift the focus from the

person's character or status to their current circumstance, thereby reducing the potential for social embarrassment.

These euphemisms function as key examples of negative politeness strategies, as described by Brown and Levinson (1987). They avoid direct mention of a face-threatening reality, poverty, by framing it in less personal, less judgmental terms. The use of such language reflects a communal desire to uphold the dignity of individuals despite their economic struggles. Rather than isolate or stigmatize, euphemistic expressions preserve interpersonal harmony by signaling empathy and discretion.

4.3 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), incorporates social and cultural norms as well as sympathy with the addressee. Moreover, they claim that positive politeness is the hearer's good self-image. The Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect speaker must be aware of the hearer's facial wants in order to recognize and respect them. The addressee wants the speaker to respect these facial gestures, which include camaraderie and warmth. In order to avoid encroaching on the hearer's personal space and independence, the speaker must exercise restraint. Another component of good politeness or face is the hearer's desire to be welcomed by others during interactions.

In some social situations, speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect employ positive politeness to show sympathy with the addressee, while in most verbal exchanges, they use negative politeness to save face (Qadi, 2009; Brown and Levinson, 1987). On the speaker's side, positive politeness shows support for the addressee. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is frequently employed to enhance or color reality.

4.3.1 Euphemisms for Death and Burial

Diverse civilizations around the world have diverse perspectives on death. Nonetheless, a characteristic that is nearly universal is the use of euphemisms when discussing this natural occurrence known as death and the actions that accompany it. This widely accepted fact also applies to the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. Positive politeness, according to Qadi

(2009), is used while demonstrating solidarity with the addressee and taking into account societal standards.

4.3.1.1 Euphemism for Death

Data collected revealed that Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers rarely refer to death directly. Instead, they use euphemisms that gently mark the journey toward death, reflecting both emotional sensitivity and cultural values. Expressions like *kubuciabucia* or *kuminjiaminjia* (blinking) were commonly used to describe the final seconds before death, allowing families to acknowledge the nearness of death without bluntness. As one elder noted, “We don’t say someone is dying, we say they are blinking.” Similarly, *ihinda ria mwĩco* (final moment) was used to describe the painful last moments, in place of *mathaa make ma gũkua* (the hour of death).

Further data showed that instead of using *gũkua* (to die), which is seen too upsetting and may therefore jeopardize the speaker's face needs, Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect speakers utilize more inoffensive phrases when discussing death. In conversations about death, speakers often avoid the direct term *gũkua* and instead use softened expressions such as :*gwĩtwa* (to be called), *gũtũtiga* (to leave us), *kũburũka* (to rest), *kũthira* (to finish), *kũthiĩ mbere* (to go first), *kũmama* (to sleep), *kwambata* (to go up), *kũthi matwini* (to go to the sky), *kũthi igurũ* (to go up), *kũthi kwi ngai* (to go to God), *kũbinga metho* (to close eyes), *kuminjia* (to close eyes), *iburuko ria tene na tene/iburuko ria mindi na mindi* (permanent peace), *kuthiaga* (to go before), *toro wa tene na tene/toro wa mindi na mindi* (permanent/forever sleep), *mwico wa rugendo/thabari* (end of the journey), *kuthii gwitu kwegu* (going to a better place), *gukoma* (to sleep), *kumagara* (to leave), *kũmathima* (to measure them), *kwambata ĩgurũ* (to go up), *kubanda mĩrĩo* (to plant arrowroots), or *gũtua mianga* (to cut cassavas). These expressions reflect a cultural tendency to soften difficult conversations, preserve emotional distance, and maintain interpersonal harmony, especially in public or emotionally charged contexts.

4.3.1.2 Euphemisms for the Corpse

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of making an upsetting statement or object appear less offensive, speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect allude to a dead body using euphemized terms. Since the word *kiimba* (corpse) is seen as offensive, it is

improper and degrading to the deceased. Furthermore, the respondents stated that the speaker would be suggesting social separation from both the addressee and the deceased if the word *kiimba* (corpse) was used. This runs counter to Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim that positive politeness strengthens the bond between the addressee and the speaker. Therefore, when referring to the deceased, speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect use polite phrases like: *mwĩri* (the body), *mũtĩga-irĩ* (a man who has left), or *mwendoniiri* (a woman, someone loved, who has left).

4.3.1.3 Euphemisms for the Grave

This study also confirmed that speakers of the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect employ positive politeness strategies in specific social contexts. Analysis of participants' responses revealed that the use of such politeness aligns with the societal and cultural expectations of the Kikuyu community. For instance, although the term *mbĩrĩra* (grave) is generally considered taboo, speakers often opt for euphemisms like: *nyumba ya kũburũka* (house of rest), or *kaburi* (grave). These softens its emotional impact. This use of euphemism reflects a form of positive politeness, as it demonstrates the speaker's intent to maintain harmony and express empathy by avoiding distressing or offensive language.

4.3.1.4 Euphemisms for Grave Diggers

Individuals tasked with grave digging, who could be referred to directly as *enji a mbĩrĩra* (grave diggers), are instead described with the more respectful term such as: *abarĩria a ĩrima* (those who prepare the hole). This linguistic choice not only elevates the social perception of the grave diggers but also reinforces solidarity between speaker and listener. Such findings support Lakoff's (1989) view that language functions as a tool for fostering relationships and minimizing conflict. By referring to grave diggers as *acimbi a ĩrima* (diggers of the hole), speakers symbolically enhance the value of their labor, thus upholding both cultural sensitivity and social cohesion.

4.3.1.5 Euphemisms for Burial

Positive politeness was also demonstrated when the speakers chose to express potentially sensitive or distressing topics using more considerate or refined language. It was evident in the context of burial practices. The direct term *kũthika* (to bury) was perceived as harsh or offensive. As a result, speakers employed alternative expressions

such as: *gūkinyia mwiri* (to make the body arrive) or *kumagaria mwiri* (to escort the body), *kūmugira kwa heri* (to say goodbye). These euphemistic choices served to soften the emotional weight of the topic, allowing the speaker to show empathy and maintain social harmony. In this way, the speaker acknowledges and respects the emotional needs of the listener, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding.

Table 4 presents data from FGDs illustrating how participants consciously choose softer, more respectful language when referring to death and related practices. The remarks captured under each theme in the table demonstrate a consistent preference for euphemistic expressions that mitigate emotional distress and uphold the dignity of the deceased and those involved in burial practices. These linguistic choices align with positive politeness strategies, which aim to maintain social harmony by expressing solidarity, showing empathy, and avoiding language that could be perceived as harsh or disrespectful. The examples in the table underscore how politeness and euphemism function not only as linguistic tools but also as cultural mechanisms for navigating the sensitive terrain of death discourse.

Table 4: Politeness in Death-related Discourse

Theme	Participant Remarks	Interpretation	Politeness Strategy
Reference to Death	“We avoid saying <i>gūkua</i> , it sounds too painful. We say <i>gwītwa</i> or <i>kūburūka</i> instead.”	Direct reference (<i>gūkua</i>) is avoided to prevent distress; euphemisms like <i>gwītwa</i> reduce emotional impact.	Positive Politeness – shows sympathy and emotional solidarity.
Talking About the Deceased	“By referring to them as <i>kiimba</i> is disrespectful, it’s like reducing them to an object.”	The term <i>kiimba</i> dehumanizes the deceased; <i>mwīri</i> and <i>mūtīga-irī</i> are more humanizing and respectful.	Positive Politeness – preserves dignity and strengthens communal bonds.
Discussing Graves	“We say <i>nyumba ya kūburūka</i> or just <i>kaburi</i> . <i>Mbīrīra</i> is too blunt.”	Grave-related terms are softened through metaphor to lessen emotional intensity.	Positive Politeness – respects emotional boundaries.
Naming the Grave Diggers	“We avoid calling them <i>enji a mbīrīra</i> , we prefer <i>abarīria īrima</i> or <i>enji a kaburi</i> .”	Euphemistic naming elevates the dignity of the role.	Positive Politeness – promotes respect and group solidarity.
Burying the Dead	“Instead of <i>kūthika</i> , we say <i>kumagaria mwīri</i> or <i>gūkinyia mwīri</i> .”	Euphemistic expressions reduce harshness and offer a sense of compassion	Positive Politeness – softens emotional impact, maintains harmony.

4.3.2 Euphemisms for Initiation and Marriage Rites

Another instance of positive politeness was noted in the context of initiation rites. During interactions with respondents, it became evident that, among the Agikuyu, certain terms related to initiation and initiates are considered taboo. As a result, Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers often use alternative expressions to soften the impact of these terms and to show solidarity with the initiates.

4.3.2.1 Circumcision

The circumcision ceremony is traditionally referred to as *kūrua* (to be circumcised), but because this term is regarded as offensive or inappropriate in polite conversation, the preferred term was *kūgimara* (to become mature). Similarly, while *arui* (initiates) is a direct term, it is also considered impolite and is typically avoided. Instead, speakers use *agimari* (those undergoing initiation), a more respectful and socially acceptable alternative. Additionally, uncircumcised individuals are often stigmatized, and derogatory terms may be used to refer to them. For the uncircumcised boy, he is referred to as *kivici/kivii* a term considered tabooed and can lead to a fight. Back when female circumcision was still practiced, though it is no longer performed today, the uncircumcised ones were referred to as *irigu/kirigu*-plural/singular respectively, a term that is tabooed. These linguistic choices reflect a clear case of positive politeness, where language is used strategically to maintain social harmony, express empathy, and uphold cultural and societal norms.

4.3.2.2 Marriage

It is evident that all rites of passage among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers are deeply embedded with euphemistic language, a reflection of the community's cultural values and belief systems. The marriage rite, like other stages of transition, is particularly characterized by the use of euphemisms that serve to align communication with social norms and expectations. For instance, the literal term for marrying, *kūgūrana* (to buy each other), is perceived as inappropriate, as it implies commodification of human relationships, a notion that is culturally unacceptable. Instead, more socially acceptable alternatives that offer a softened and respectful depiction of the marriage process are used. They include: *kūbikania* (to marry), *kūgĩa mūdũ* (to get someone), or *kūgĩa andũ* (to get people).

Similarly, terms used to describe marital roles are subject to euphemistic reformulation. The term for husband, *mūrūme* (the one who bites or eats), is considered impolite and is often replaced with *mūbikania* (bridegroom), a more respectful expression. The traditional term for wife, *mūka* (one who has come), is regarded as potentially offensive, particularly in light of contemporary concerns around gender equality. Critics of dowry practices argue that such language reinforces outdated notions of ownership and commodification of women. In response, Gĩgicugu speakers often use the term *mūbiki* (bride) instead. After marriage, the terms used continue to reflect this polite reformulation: the husband is referred to as *mūthuri*, while the wife is called *mūtumia* (one who keeps secrets), both of which carry connotations of respect and social harmony.

Data in table 5 include illustrative excerpts from natural speech recordings important in highlighting the linguistic sensitivity surrounding initiation and marriage rites among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, revealing how participants consciously avoid direct or potentially offensive terms in favor of more respectful and culturally attuned alternatives. Each theme, from circumcision terminology to marital descriptions and spousal roles, reflects a consistent pattern of strategic language use aimed at upholding communal values and mitigating social discomfort. These patterns as in the table, underscore the role of language as both a mirror of cultural norms and a tool for maintaining interpersonal harmony.

Table 5: Marriage and Circumcision in the Gĩgĩcũgũ Dialect

Theme	Participant Remarks	Interpretations	Politeness Strategy
Circumcision Terminology	“We say <i>kũgimara</i> because <i>kũrua</i> sounds harsh and shameful.	<i>Kũrua</i> is considered crude; <i>kũgimara</i> is preferred to express maturity and respect.	Positive politeness – emphasis on empathy and inclusion.
Referring to Initiates	“Calling them <i>agimari</i> is more respectful than <i>arui</i> .”	The euphemism <i>agimari</i> softens social identity and avoids stigmatization.	Positive politeness – promotes dignity and social harmony.
Addressing Uncircumcised Individuals	“Some names used are mocking; elders tell us not to use them.”	Derogatory terms exist but are discouraged in formal or respectful speech.	Positive politeness – minimizes social distance and stigma.
Marriage Descriptions	“Saying <i>kũgũrana</i> makes it seem like buying a person. That’s not okay.	The commercial connotation of <i>kũgũrana</i> is culturally inappropriate; alternatives are preferred.	Positive politeness – aligns with evolving cultural values
Describing Spousal Roles	“ <i>Mũrũme</i> and <i>mũka</i> sound outdated or disrespectful.”	Polite alternatives like <i>mũthuri</i> and <i>mũtumia</i> are used to reflect mutual respect and modern sensibilities.	Positive politeness – reinforces respect within relationships

4.3.3 Politeness in Gĩgĩcũgũ Exclamations

Exclamations are a natural and spontaneous part of human speech, often used to express emotions such as surprise, frustration, excitement, or disbelief. In the Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community, however, exclamatory language is far from random or unregulated. The data gathered from Focus Group Discussions and natural speech recordings revealed a strong cultural preference for restrained, polite exclamatory forms, especially in public or mixed-age interactions. While the expressive function of exclamations is acknowledged, their social impact is carefully considered. For instance, a phrase like *kangura!* (vagina), though sometimes used among peers to express shock, anger, or pain, is widely regarded as vulgar and inappropriate in most social settings. Its use risks being seen as aggressive, disrespectful, or even offensive, particularly when uttered in the presence of elders, authority figures, or mixed-gender company.

To maintain social decorum, speakers instead reach for softer, less confrontational alternatives. Expressions like *kabiri!* (used as a mild oath), *wee!* (shock or disbelief), *Ngai!* (invoking God), *aiyaa!* (surprise), or even *kaamundu!* (small person) serve similar expressive purposes while minimizing face-threatening implications. These alternatives strike a balance between emotional expression and cultural expectations of politeness, enabling speakers to convey intensity without violating social norms.

This strategic choice of language reflects more than personal preference, it demonstrates an underlying cultural value system that prioritizes emotional restraint, mutual respect, and community harmony. Public expressions of anger or shock are often viewed as immature or socially disruptive, particularly in a community that values discretion and humility. Therefore, exclamations are not used recklessly but are instead finely calibrated to suit the context, showing a high level of linguistic awareness and social sensitivity.

From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, this pattern reflects the interplay of both positive and negative politeness strategies. Choosing mild or humorous exclamations helps to maintain positive face, that is, the speaker's desire to be liked, accepted, or seen as considerate. It fosters a sense of solidarity, especially when the chosen expression resonates with commonly accepted norms. Simultaneously, the avoidance of harsh or taboo exclamations like *kangura!* is an example of negative politeness, a strategy that respects the listener's desire not to be imposed upon or offended. In essence, speakers take precautions not to intrude emotionally or verbally on others' comfort zones.

Social variables such as age, status, gender, and setting further shape these linguistic choices. Younger speakers, for example, tend to be especially careful when addressing older individuals, often substituting strong exclamations with neutral or reverential alternatives to signal respect and avoid confrontation. In formal settings, such as religious gatherings or community meetings, emotionally neutral or spiritually grounded expressions like *Ngai!* are preferred, as they align with the tone of the occasion. In more informal, peer-group contexts, slightly bolder exclamations may surface, though still moderated to avoid causing offense or appearing uncultured.

Ultimately, the use of polite exclamations in Gĩgĩcũgũ reflects a broader cultural understanding of language as a tool for emotional regulation and social harmony. Rather than simply expressing inner states, these exclamations operate within a framework of shared norms and expectations. They allow speakers to navigate emotionally sensitive moments with tact and grace, protecting both their own social image and the face of their interlocutors. In doing so, they reinforce community values, foster respectful interaction, and showcase the subtle pragmatics that characterize everyday Gĩgĩcũgũ communication.

4.4 The Function of Euphemism in Conveying Meaning

Euphemism is a universal linguistic phenomenon, employed across languages to mitigate the impact of expressions deemed offensive, profane, or emotionally charged, according to culturally defined norms. This study explores the communicative function of euphemized lexical items in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, particularly within socially sensitive contexts such as sexuality, excretion, death, initiation, and marriage, among others. These domains often evoke heightened emotional responses, necessitating the use of euphemistic language to express meaning in a socially acceptable and culturally sanctioned manner.

Etymologically, "euphemism" derives from the Greek term meaning "to speak well" or "to speak appropriately." Within the Gĩgĩcũgũ speech community, subjects such as sexuality and death are considered culturally sensitive and are not to be discussed explicitly in all settings or by all individuals. For instance, conversations regarding sexuality are reserved for private settings and are typically mediated by elder family members such as aunts and grandparents. Nonetheless, these subjects must be addressed from time to time, and euphemism serves as a crucial linguistic tool to facilitate their discussion without violating social norms. The data for this study was obtained through FGDs and recordings of naturalistic speech among native speakers. The findings delineate the various roles euphemism plays in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect in the process of meaning construction and communication.

4.4.1 Facilitating Genuine Communication

Euphemism enhances communication by enabling interlocutors to convey sensitive messages without breaching cultural taboos or social etiquette. In conversations involving emotionally loaded topics such as sexuality, death, initiation, and excretion, speakers resort to euphemism to maintain communicative effectiveness while adhering to societal expectations of decorum. According to Lakoff (1973), communication is governed by dual principles of clarity and politeness. When these principles conflict, politeness generally takes precedence, particularly in culturally sensitive contexts.

In this regard, euphemism enables speakers to preserve the sincerity and cooperative nature of interaction, as posited by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. For example, in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, the term *kũthicana* (to have sex) is considered profane and is rarely uttered in polite company. Instead, expressions such as *gwĩkana* (to do one another), *kwĩguana* (to understand one another), and *kũrĩana* (to eat one another) are employed to convey the same meaning while reducing the potential for face-threatening acts (FTAs).

Similarly, references to excretion are handled with euphemistic language to ensure mutual respect between interlocutors. The act of defecation, referred to as *kũmĩa*, is regarded as offensive. Euphemized alternatives like *gwĩtethia* (to help oneself) and *kabinda* (a long call) are used instead, preserving politeness and mutual face needs.

4.4.2 Promoting Politeness

Politeness, central to all human interactions, is another fundamental function of euphemism. As defined by Scollon and Scollon (2001), politeness reflects the social distance between speakers and the roles they assume during interaction. Fraser (1990) outlines multiple theoretical perspectives on politeness, including the social-norm, face-saving, and conversational-maxim views, all of which inform the communicative behavior of Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers.

The discussion of death, for example, is navigated with heightened sensitivity. The term *gũkua* (to die) is culturally taboo and therefore avoided. Instead, speakers employ expressions such as *gwĩtwa* (to be called), *kũburũka* (to rest), *kwambata* (to go up) and

kũmathima (to measure them) to express the event in a more culturally acceptable manner. Additionally, the term *kimba* (corpse) is avoided due to its offensive connotations. Alternatives such as *mwĩrĩ* (the body) or *mũtiga-irĩ* (one who has left) are preferred to maintain social harmony and demonstrate empathy.

During initiation ceremonies, euphemisms function to affirm social solidarity and respect. Terms such as *kũrua* (to be circumcised) and *arui* (initiates) are avoided due to their pejorative undertones. Instead, expressions like *kũgimara* (to be mature) and *agimari* (those ready for initiation) are used to elevate the status of the initiates and foster inclusivity. Within the domain of marriage, the lexical item *kũgũrwa* (to be bought), suggesting commodification, is similarly replaced with *kũhika* (to get married), which presents the relationship in a more respectful and relationally appropriate manner.

4.4.3 Avoiding Taboo

The role of euphemism in circumventing taboo expressions is deeply rooted in societal moral codes and cultural training. Fraser (1990) notes that social norms serve as a benchmark for delineating acceptable discourse, while Momanyi (2019) observes that children are socialized early to avoid uttering culturally proscribed terms. Among the Gĩgĩcũgũ, references to private body parts are taboo. The male reproductive organ (*mũthinũ*) and testicles (*ntheke*), as well as the female reproductive organ (*mbĩni*), are rarely mentioned directly. Euphemized alternatives like *mũtĩ* (tree/stick) and *nyamũ* (animal) are employed to avoid breaching social norms.

Similarly, *matina* (buttocks) is replaced with *ndũnũ*. Childbirth also involves euphemized language. Rather than using *gũciara* (to give birth), speakers opt for expressions such as *kũgĩa mwana* (to bear a child) or *kũrathimwa* (to be blessed). The placenta (*thigiri*), considered taboo, is referred to metaphorically as *nyomba ya mwana* (house of the baby), illustrating a cognitive mapping of familiar concepts onto culturally sensitive referents.

4.4.4 Disguising Harsh Realities

Euphemism also serves the function of concealing or softening harsh realities, thereby facilitating empathy and mitigating emotional discomfort. Al-Qadi (2009) describes euphemism as a linguistic strategy aimed at making discourse more palatable. In contexts such as death, this function becomes particularly salient. For instance, instead of using *gũkua* (to die), Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers employed metaphorical expressions like *kũthiĩ rūgendo/thabari* (to go on a journey) or *kũthira* (to end), framing death as a transition rather than a termination. The corpse, ordinarily referred to as *kimba*, is more respectfully addressed as *mwĩrĩ* (the body) or *mũtiga-irĩ* (one who has left). Burial practices are similarly euphemized; *kũthika* (to bury) is replaced by *gũkinyia* or *kumagaria* (to escort), metaphorically portraying burial as part of a journey. Such euphemisms serve both to express reverence for the deceased and to soften the existential implications of death for the living.

CHAPTER FIVE

EUPHEMISM AND MISCOMMUNICATION

5.1 Generational Differences in Euphemism Usage

The findings from Focus Group Discussions and natural recordings revealed a clear generational divide in the use and interpretation of euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect. For older speakers, euphemisms are more than politeness, they embody identity, cultural continuity, and social grace. In contrast, younger speakers, especially those aged 18–35, tend to favor direct language, influenced by urbanization, digital culture, and formal education. This divergence frequently led to pragmatic failures where the intended emotional or cultural meaning of a euphemism was lost or misunderstood. This overarching difference is further illustrated across specific domains of life, where euphemism use reveals nuanced contrasts in generational perspectives and communicative priorities.

5.1.1 Pregnancy

Pregnancy remains a deeply sensitive and culturally significant topic in many African societies, and among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, this sensitivity is reflected in the deliberate use of euphemism. Older speakers often employ the expression *kũheo ũtũmwo* (to be blessed) in place of direct references to pregnancy. This phrase, deeply embedded in the community's moral and spiritual worldview, exemplifies negative politeness, a strategy aimed at minimizing imposition, maintaining social distance, and preserving the face of both speaker and hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Rather than confronting the physical or sexual realities of pregnancy, the euphemism recasts it as a sacred, dignified occurrence, aligning with communal values of modesty, respect, and spiritual affirmation.

One older participant explained: *“When you say a girl is blessed, “kũheo ũtũmwo”, you are not just avoiding the word ‘pregnant’; you are giving dignity to life.”* This sentiment highlights the dual function of the euphemism, not only as a face-saving linguistic tool but also as a form of cultural encoding, where the life-giving nature of pregnancy is framed in spiritually uplifting terms. From a pragmatic perspective, this aligns with the notion that euphemisms often operate as indexical expressions, signaling

shared values and emotional sensitivity within a specific speech community (Leech, 2005; Allan & Burridge, 2006).

However, the interpretation of this euphemism is not static across generations. Among younger speakers particularly those influenced by urban lifestyles, mass media, and formal education systems, *kũheo ũtũmwo*, is sometimes seen as vague, overly symbolic, or even unnecessary. This dissonance mirrors observations by Irvine (1996), who notes that generational shifts in language reflect larger sociocultural changes, including the erosion of traditional communicative norms under the pressure of globalization and individualistic ideologies.

Several youth participants reported feeling either amused or confused upon hearing the phrase, with some interpreting it as outdated or irrelevant to modern contexts. This mismatch in understanding creates a pragmatic barrier, where the intended politeness and reverence of the older generation is lost on younger interlocutors. As a result, elders may perceive a loss of decorum or disrespect, while younger individuals may feel alienated by what they perceive as obscure or overly cautious language.

This scenario highlights the centrality of contextual sharedness, or the lack thereof, in the successful deployment of euphemism. While *kũheo ũtũmwo* functions effectively as a negative politeness strategy among older, culturally aligned interlocutors, its efficacy diminishes when used in intergenerational communication, where assumptions of shared meaning no longer hold. Here, the study reinforces a broader pragmatic concern: that euphemism, though meant to promote harmony, can become a site of miscommunication when cultural and generational knowledge diverge.

5.1.2 Emotional Sensitivity and Spiritual Respect

Among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, emotionally and spiritually sensitive topics such as death and morality are commonly addressed through carefully chosen euphemisms. Older speakers, in particular, tend to favor expressions such as *kuuma kwĩ Ngai* (going to God) to refer to death and *kwĩgĩra ithe wa mwana* (finding the child's father) to indirectly discuss issues of paternity. These expressions function as forms of negative politeness, aiming to mitigate the potential discomfort or embarrassment that might

arise from direct reference to morally or emotionally charged realities. By avoiding direct speech, the speaker respects the interlocutor's desire for emotional distance and preserves face in potentially face-threatening contexts.

In addition to serving as strategies of negative politeness, these euphemisms also exemplify off-record politeness, where a speaker intentionally uses ambiguous or indirect language, relying on the hearer to infer the intended meaning. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), off-record strategies involve indirectness that allows the speaker to avoid full commitment to a statement, thereby reducing the risk of offense. For example, *kwĩgĩra ithe wa mwana* subtly alludes to issues of paternity without explicitly naming sexual relations or illegitimacy, topics which might provoke shame or moral judgment if addressed directly.

Such euphemistic language carries cultural weight. It reflects a communicative ethos in which tact, modesty, and spiritual framing are prioritized over bluntness. The use of these phrases affirms shared moral values and maintains social harmony, aligning with the broader understanding in pragmatics that language is a socially situated act (Leech, 2005; Watts, 2003). In this view, euphemisms act not merely as lexical substitutions but as culturally sanctioned communicative strategies for preserving dignity and community cohesion.

However, these traditional euphemisms often encounter resistance or misunderstanding among younger speakers. In many Focus Group Discussions, younger participants, particularly those influenced by urban education, Western media, and more direct styles of communication, found such expressions overly cautious, formal, or even perplexing. For instance, some interpreted *kuuma kwĩ Ngai* as an overly spiritualized or evasive way of describing death, which they felt lacked transparency or emotional clarity.

This intergenerational dissonance reflects a deeper pragmatic shift. As Holmes (2013) argues, pragmatic competence is shaped by cultural exposure and discourse norms; when these shift across generations, the implicit rules governing politeness and euphemism also change. What one generation views as respectful restraint, another may see as lack of clarity or unnecessary indirection.

Moreover, such misunderstandings demonstrate how euphemisms can serve not only as tools of face management but also as boundaries of cultural inclusion. When younger speakers fail to interpret euphemisms like *kwĩgĩra ithe wa mwana*, they are inadvertently excluded from shared meaning, undermining the very social cohesion that euphemism is designed to uphold. This tension reinforces the idea that effective politeness strategies depend on shared contextual knowledge, without which, even well-intentioned language can lead to communicative breakdown (Thomas, 1995).

5.1.3 Death

Older speakers often relied on deeply metaphorical language when referring to death, drawing on imagery that was both poetic and culturally grounded. One striking example is the phrase *kugũa igũrũ na magũrũ ta nyoni* (falling from the sky with legs like a bird), used to describe sudden or unexpected death. This metaphor conveys a sense of abruptness, vulnerability, and the fragility of life. Yet, for many younger listeners, the expression was either unfamiliar or misinterpreted. Some thought it referred to dreams or flight, not death, highlighting how symbolic language can lose its interpretive power when cultural transmission weakens.

Conversely, younger speakers have introduced their own euphemisms for death, shaped by urban slang, religious influence, or digital shorthand. Common phrases included *kuthii Sayuni* (going to Zion or Heaven), *kũmathima* (to measure them), and *kũmiria* (simply, to go). While these expressions are intended to soften the finality of death and make the topic more palatable, they can sound vague, overly casual, or even irreverent to older speakers.

For instance, one elder expressed confusion at the term *kũmathima*, stating that she initially thought it referred to a medical check-up or some form of evaluation. Another remarked that *kũthii Sayuni* sounded overly Christianized or detached from indigenous cultural understandings of death and the afterlife. In such cases, youth euphemisms, though emotionally meaningful within their own circles, risk alienating older interlocutors who find the terms spiritually insufficient or contextually confusing.

This bidirectional misunderstanding, where older metaphors confuse the youth and youth slang puzzles the elders, underscores the evolving and contested nature of euphemistic language. Death, perhaps the most sensitive of human topics, becomes a linguistic battleground where competing worldviews, cultural reference points, and emotional registers collide. Ultimately, euphemisms around death are not just about avoiding discomfort. They reveal how each generation processes mortality, either through reverence and poetic distance or through coded casualness and abstraction. When shared meaning erodes, even the gentlest expressions can provoke misunderstanding, making intergenerational dialogue around death both necessary and fragile.

5.1.4 Sexual Activity

Sexuality remains one of the most linguistically sensitive domains across cultures, and within the Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community, euphemism plays a crucial role in navigating the delicate intersection of modesty, morality, and social expectations. Among older speakers, especially women, sexual activity is often referenced through metaphorical and deeply coded expressions such as *kũrĩa thĩĩnĩ wa nguo* (to eat inside the clothes). This euphemism exemplifies a negative politeness strategy, where the speaker seeks to avoid imposition, maintain decorum, and respect the interlocutor's sensibilities. It functions not only as a shield from taboo but also as a moral compass, allowing delicate matters to be discussed without vulgarity or directness.

One older female participant noted: *"You do not just say such things plainly. You protect the ears of those around you, especially the young."* This underscores the euphemism's social function: safeguarding both the speaker and listener from embarrassment, while upholding communal values of decency. However, younger generations, particularly those shaped by urban life, exposure to mass media, and peer-group discourse, often found such expressions either incomprehensible or humorous. One young man, upon hearing *kũrĩa thĩĩnĩ wa nguo*, laughed and said: *"I thought someone was eating food under a blanket."*

In contrast, youth tended to use euphemisms rooted in positive politeness strategies, which aim to create solidarity and shared understanding within peer groups. Common

expressions included *gwīkana* (to do each other) and *kuriana* (to eat each other). These are more direct, using slang that still softens explicitness but aligns with the conversational norms of the younger generation. Such language reflects a shift in values, from discretion and moral caution to relatability and expressive immediacy.

More strikingly, some younger speakers employed highly figurative slang euphemisms such as: *gutwarithia mwīcīkīri* (to ride the bicycle), *kūrimira mūgūnda* (to dig the garden). These metaphors, while playful and imaginative, were often opaque to older generations. One elderly male participant remarked that he initially thought *kūrimira mūgūnda* referred to literal farming. Another woman added that *gutwarithia mwīcīkīri* sounded like a child's game, not an intimate act.

From a pragmatic perspective, these youth expressions operate as off-record strategies, rich in inference and ambiguity, leaving the interpretation up to the hearer. However, without shared contextual knowledge, they become communicative barriers rather than face-saving tools. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that off-record strategies are only effective when speakers share enough cultural background to decode the implication. In the absence of this shared ground, such euphemisms risk triggering misunderstanding, discomfort, or unintentional disrespect.

Gender also emerged as a significant variable in euphemistic preferences. Older women continued to rely on euphemisms as a form of linguistic shielding, preserving social harmony and protecting their own and others' face. Younger men, by contrast, were more inclined toward direct, humorous, or even graphic expressions, emphasizing authenticity over subtlety.

This evolving lexicon illustrates not only linguistic creativity but also a deeper transformation in the cultural encoding of intimacy and modesty. For elders, euphemism is an act of social responsibility; for youth, it becomes a space for peer bonding, expression, and occasionally, rebellion. What remains constant, however, is the use of euphemism as a tool of pragmatic negotiation, albeit one shaped by age, gender, and cultural orientation. Euphemisms around sexual activity in Gĩgĩcũgũ

discourse therefore demonstrate the theoretical richness of politeness theory when applied to intergenerational pragmatics.

5.1.5 Responsibility and Life Transitions

In Gĩgĩcũgũ discourse, older speakers often employed euphemisms to frame life responsibilities and transitions in ways that emphasized communal belonging and dignified restraint. For example, phrases such as *kũnina mĩrigo* (to finish duties) to refer to retirement, or *kũheo mũrigo* (to be given a load) when describing the assumption of responsibilities, exemplify negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These expressions avoid bald declarations by softening personal milestones, projecting humility and respect for social norms.

Such euphemisms do more than communicate events, they encode moral expectations and collective values, framing individual achievements as shared social obligations. For many younger speakers, these expressions were opaque or irrelevant to their lived realities. For instance, a youth participant interpreted *kũrĩa mũthĩri* (to eat an end) as a literal reference to food, not recognizing it as a metaphor for completing a life phase or task. This points to a loss of shared cultural frames, reducing the efficacy of these euphemisms as off-record strategies. In Brown and Levinson's framework, off-record utterances depend on shared contextual knowledge to succeed. Without this, euphemisms fail to mitigate face threats, they instead create communicative friction. The pragmatic breakdown here reflects deeper generational shifts. Older speakers felt their nuanced ways of speaking were being dismissed, while youth felt confused or excluded by expressions they viewed as indirect or outdated. This aligns with Irvine's (1996) observation that language ideologies evolve alongside changing social structures. In this case, the erosion of communal interpretive norms weakens the euphemism's role as a bridge between politeness and understanding.

5.1.6 Self-Reflection and Lifestyle

Older generations also utilized euphemisms to critique or describe lifestyle choices in a face-saving and indirect manner, reflecting high sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics. The phrase *kũgũruka mũgũnda* (to walk the land) was traditionally employed to describe someone as idle or aimless. It functioned as a negative politeness strategy,

allowing speakers to express social disapproval without direct confrontation. By invoking metaphor and moral undertones, the phrase acted as a subtle corrective, balancing truthfulness with tact.

Such euphemisms align with Goffman's (1967) notion of face as a socially situated construct, and with Leech's (2005) politeness principle, which advocates for avoiding expressions that may threaten social harmony. However, younger speakers often missed the underlying critique. Many interpreted *kūgūruka mūgūnda* literally, unaware of its implied disapproval. This semantic disconnect points again to a breakdown in shared pragmatic inference, rendering the euphemism ineffective as a communicative strategy.

Conversely, younger speakers introduced euphemisms grounded in their own experiences and sociolects. For example, the phrase *gūcoka base* (to return to base) was commonly used by youth to express a period of personal reflection or regrouping after failure. While the phrase may reflect positive politeness by fostering in-group solidarity and shared experience, it lacked resonance for older generations unfamiliar with its context or figurative scope.

This generational shift in euphemistic usage demonstrates that euphemisms are not static lexical items but socially embedded indexes of time-bound values, social orientations, and communicative preferences. As Clark (1996) argues, interpretation is a joint action, and without mutual ground, even polite strategies can become sources of confusion. The transition from metaphor-laden rebuke to casual self-reflection shows how the same communicative goals, managing face, expressing critique, or signaling introspection, take on different pragmatic forms across generations.

5.1.7 Arrest

Discussions around law enforcement and criminality also revealed clear generational differences in euphemistic language. Older speakers often use the phrase *kūnyitwo* (to be taken) when referring to someone who has been arrested. This indirect expression avoids directly naming criminal activity or legal repercussions, instead offering a socially acceptable way to discuss a potentially shameful event. It serves a face-saving

function, protecting the dignity of both the individual and their family in public discourse.

To many elders, this linguistic strategy is rooted in values of tact and discretion. In contrast, younger speakers frequently reported confusion or misinterpretation. One youth asked whether *kũnyitwo* meant someone had been picked up for a church meeting or offered a lift, completely missing the legal implication. This misreading, highlights more than just a vocabulary gap, it reflects differing communicative norms: where elders prioritize modesty, youth often value transparency and directness.

An alternative term used by younger speakers is *kũobwa* (to be closed), a slang expression that directly and unambiguously signifies that someone has been detained or imprisoned. Unlike *kũnyitwo*, which veils the seriousness of the situation, *kũobwa* draws attention to it. This reflects positive politeness among peers, where solidarity and shared understanding are more important than modesty. It actually paints a vivid image of restriction and consequence, aligning with the younger generation's preference for clear, candid communication, especially when discussing justice, legal consequences, or personal risk.

This lexical shift also reflects a broader generational reorientation: younger speakers often see euphemism not as a tool for politeness, but as a potential barrier to truth and accountability. In legal or civic contexts, where clarity can impact decisions or safety, this tension becomes particularly important. When elders speak to youth using veiled euphemisms like *kũnyitwo*, the message may fail to register. In contrast, youth terms like *kũobwa* leave little room for ambiguity, and for them, that's the point.

5.1.8 Toilet

The generational differences in euphemism use became conspicuous in the mention of toilet. A striking example involved the phrase *kwa Mwaura* (at Mwaura's) which many younger participants used to refer to the toilet. The term, they explained, originated in school environments where "Mwaura" was the janitor responsible for cleaning the washrooms. Over time, his name evolved into a light-hearted euphemism among students, widely understood within their peer groups and often used with a sense of

humor. This is mostly off-record strategy, playful and indirect. Among youth, this is also positive politeness, since it builds in-group humor and shared reference.

However, in intergenerational conversations, particularly with elders unfamiliar with the phrase's origin, the term created confusion. Some older participants assumed it referred to a specific person or home, missing the intended reference entirely and, in a few cases, finding it inappropriate. This example illustrates how euphemistic language, while effective within a particular social circle, can break down when shared cultural knowledge is lacking.

5.1.9 Menstruation

Menstruation, like many intimate topics, is surrounded by euphemistic language across generations, with noticeable differences in interpretation and pragmatic function. Among older Gĩgĩcũgũ women, expressions such as *kũrugũũra mĩthenya yake* (opening her days) were commonly used to refer to menstruation. These euphemisms rely on negative politeness strategies, functioning to minimize embarrassment, uphold social decorum, and maintain distance from the biological reality of the subject. In formal or mixed-gender settings, such expressions allowed speakers to navigate culturally sensitive terrain with discretion and grace.

The indirection employed here also operates as an off-record strategy, where meaning is implied rather than explicitly stated. The speaker signals awareness of the topic's potential to threaten face, both her own and that of the listener, by veiling it in metaphor. This aligns with broader African communicative norms that prioritize indirectness in matters related to the body and reproductive health (Irvine, 1996).

However, for many younger women, particularly those raised in urban contexts or exposed to media-driven discourses on reproductive health, such expressions appeared vague or confusing. For instance, one university student in a focus group recalled thinking *kũrugũũra mĩthenya yake* referred to a woman's birthday or personal celebration. Another shared that she had only learned the term's real meaning through gossip, not direct instruction. These anecdotes reflect a pragmatic breakdown: the

inferential work required by off-record euphemisms is not supported by a shared cultural or experiential frame, leading to misinterpretation.

In contrast, younger women often used euphemisms such as *machiru* (a name of a woman, Wanjiru) and *mweri* (moon). These terms, while still euphemistic, reflect positive politeness strategies within peer groups, functioning to affirm in-group solidarity and shared knowledge without invoking shame. Unlike traditional metaphors that strive to mask or soften, these newer euphemisms are more playful and coded, embedded in contemporary social identities shaped by informal education and digital communication.

Older participants, however, often failed to grasp these terms. One elder woman remarked that she had assumed *machiru* was simply someone's name, not a menstrual reference. This generational misalignment reinforces how euphemisms, while serving to conceal, also reveal gaps in shared knowledge and values. Euphemistic language, far from being universally clarifying or respectful, is context-bound: effective only when interlocutors share cultural grounding and communicative norms.

5.1.10 Human Anatomy

Discussions around human anatomy similarly revealed stark generational differences in euphemistic language. Traditionally, older speakers in the Gĩgĩcũgũ community used terms like *gwakwa* as discreet references to private parts, particularly in the presence of children or during moral instruction. Rooted in negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), such euphemisms served to reduce embarrassment, uphold social decorum, and signal respect.

However, younger participants often failed to grasp the euphemistic weight of such terms. To many youths, *gwakwa* simply translates to “my home,” stripping it of its cultural coding. This misunderstanding was illustrated in a group discussion when an elder used *gwakwa* metaphorically to refer to sexual integrity. A younger participant, unaware of the context, quipped: “*Ona ninyendete kuthi gwakwa wiki ikithira*” (Even I like visiting my home on weekends). The result was a ripple of laughter and confusion, leaving the elder visibly uncomfortable and unable to proceed with her point.

Moreover, youth have introduced a parallel lexicon of metaphors that, while vivid and humorous within their peer groups, are often unintelligible, or even offensive, to older generations. Terms like *mũgwi* (arrow) or *mũtĩ* (stick) are used to refer to the penis, while *mũgũnda* (garden) serves as a euphemism for the female genitalia. One male youth described sexual activity using the phrase *kũrĩmira mũgũnda* (to dig the garden), a metaphor that elicited amusement from his peers but was perceived as crude and disrespectful by older participants. These newer euphemisms reflect a shift toward symbolic playfulness and coded slang, often rooted in urban or digital subcultures. Yet they also risk deepening intergenerational divides, especially when older speakers interpret such language as vulgar or dismissive of cultural values around modesty and respect.

As these examples show, euphemisms related to anatomy are not merely linguistic choices; they are embedded in value systems. When these values diverge, communication falters, not only linguistically but also emotionally and socially. The challenge lies in recognizing that euphemism, while designed to soften, can inadvertently harden generational boundaries when shared understanding is lost.

5.1.11 Poverty

Poverty, though a difficult subject, is handled with particular grace among older Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, who often use phrases like *kũhota kũrĩa* (to manage to eat), a reference that aligns with negative politeness instead of directly stating someone is poor. This phrasing focuses on survival rather than lack, and it reflects a cultural approach that preserves a person's dignity even in hardship. It implies effort, resilience, and subtle empathy, rather than pity or judgment.

For younger speakers, however, such indirect expressions may lack impact. A young participant in one FGD responded, "*Niki utangiuga ni athinu?*" (Why not just say that they are broke?)- highlighting a preference for immediacy and plainness aligning with positive politeness. Yet this desire for directness often clashes with older generations' efforts to shield listeners from shame or emotional discomfort. In a society where naming someone as poor directly may be seen as rude or heartless, the euphemism serves an important role. The breakdown in shared understanding here not only leads

to awkward conversations but also signals a shift in how poverty is viewed less as a communal condition and more as an individual circumstance, often expressed without the same layers of respect or restraint.

The insights from Ngula (2016), (Irvine, 1996), Clark (1996), Karanja (2010), and Ndung'u (2011) have provided a valuable foundation for this section, offering key insights that have both guided and deepened the analysis. Building on their contributions, this section adds fresh perspectives on the delicate interplay between language, generational identity, and cultural continuity. As society continues to evolve, the role of euphemism must be understood not as fixed, but as part of an ongoing dialogue about respect, identity, and change. Promoting intergenerational conversation may be essential to preserving these culturally meaningful expressions, bridging the wisdom of the past with the clarity and directness embraced by today's youth. In this way, euphemism remains not a fading tradition, but a living, adaptable expression of shared meaning in a changing world.

5.2 Social Stratification

The use of euphemism in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect is deeply rooted in social stratification. Data from naturally occurring speech and Focus Group Discussions showed that euphemistic expressions were not just linguistic choices but indicators of social position, authority, and cultural alignment. Elders, religious leaders, educators, and other respected figures consistently employed euphemism as a politeness strategy, while younger and less institutionally affiliated speakers often relied on direct or coded speech. These patterns reveal both the communicative richness and the limitations imposed by social hierarchy. The influence of social hierarchy on euphemism use becomes evident across various domains, where roles and contexts shape both the choice of language and its interpretation.

5.2.1 Funeral Ceremony

The phrase *gũcokia ngoma mũthenya* (returning the spirit in broad daylight) is commonly used by church elders during funeral sermons to refer to death. This euphemism serves as an off-record politeness strategy where speakers rely on metaphor and indirectness to avoid imposing distress or discomfort on listeners. It also reflects

negative politeness, as it softens the harshness of death and maintains communal decorum in emotionally charged settings. In these formal religious contexts, euphemistic language reinforces spiritual reverence and group cohesion by aligning mortality with divine return rather than finality. The phrasing is embedded within a culturally shared metaphysical worldview, where the soul's return to God is considered a communal rather than private matter.

However, the use of such metaphor-laden language presents interpretive challenges, particularly among younger listeners or non-native speakers who may lack familiarity with the cultural and theological underpinnings of the euphemism. Several youth participants in the study reported either misinterpreting the phrase or feeling emotionally detached during funeral proceedings due to the abstractness of the language. This suggests a potential breakdown in pragmatic competence across generations, where shared inferences no longer hold (Thomas, 1995).

This finding builds on Tchiehie (2012), who examined the role of euphemism in maintaining group solidarity during funeral rituals. While her research emphasized the cohesive function of traditional rhetoric, this study extends the debate by demonstrating that such euphemisms can lose communicative efficacy when cultural continuity is disrupted. In such instances, euphemism, though intended to shield, can inadvertently blur emotional clarity, creating a sense of distance rather than connection.

In broader pragmatic terms, this illustrates the limitations of off-record strategies when mutual background knowledge is not guaranteed. The tension here lies between preserving dignity through indirectness and ensuring interpretability in a shifting linguistic landscape. As younger generations increasingly favor more on-record, explicit forms of communication, driven by media exposure and urbanization, traditional euphemisms risk becoming less effective in fulfilling their social and emotional functions. Thus, *gũcokia ngoma mũthenya* exemplifies both the power and fragility of euphemism as a socio-pragmatic tool. It preserves collective respect and spiritual meaning for one group, while potentially alienating another, highlighting the need for adaptive language strategies that can bridge generational divides without sacrificing cultural depth.

5.2.2 Sexual Activity in Educational Setting

In educational settings, teachers frequently employed the euphemistic phrase *gūtemba na gūthuthũkia* (wandering and slipping) to allude to sexual activity among students. This usage reflects a clear application of negative politeness strategies, as it avoids direct reference to a morally sensitive topic, particularly in mixed-gender classrooms where embarrassment could arise. The euphemism serves a face-saving function both for the speaker (teacher) and the hearers (students), aligning with traditional cultural values of modesty and indirectness in public discourse. It maintains classroom decorum while communicating an important, though delicate, subject. However, this approach is a form of off-record strategy, relying on students' ability to infer the intended meaning, something not guaranteed, especially among younger learners unfamiliar with such figurative codes.

Several focus group participants, particularly students, revealed that they struggled to understand the euphemism, reducing its instructional clarity and effectiveness. This failure in pragmatic transmission exposes a key tension between cultural sensitivity and pedagogical transparency. While Putra and Widodo (2020) argue that euphemisms in public discourse can soften sensitive issues at the expense of clarity, this study advances the discussion by illustrating how power asymmetries in classroom settings, where teachers hold authority and students often hesitate to seek clarification, can exacerbate the breakdown in meaning.

Moreover, students' preference for more direct, relatable language signals a generational shift in pragmatic expectations, where clarity is often valued over cultural deference. Consequently, the euphemism *gūtemba na gūthuthũkia*, though well-intentioned, risks failing in its communicative and educational function when mutual background knowledge is lacking. This case highlights the need for context-sensitive strategies that balance cultural propriety with pragmatic accessibility in evolving classroom dynamics.

5.2.3 Childbirth

In maternal healthcare contexts, nurses were observed using the euphemistic phrase *kuuma na magũrũ matano* (to leave with five legs) to refer to childbirth. This indirect

expression exemplifies a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), functioning to protect both speaker and hearer from the discomfort of explicitly discussing intimate bodily experiences. It reflects a culturally rooted effort to preserve dignity, particularly in public or gender-mixed clinical spaces. However, while the euphemism respects cultural expectations of modesty, its metaphorical opacity posed significant challenges.

Younger or first-time mothers, especially those without deep cultural grounding, often failed to grasp its intended meaning. Some interpreted it literally or dismissed it as irrelevant, which in certain cases led to delayed comprehension of medical instructions or missed cues about their own health status. This echoes findings by Ramadhani and Jufrizal (2022), who noted that euphemistic language in Tanzanian maternal clinics could obscure critical health information. The current study extends that insight by demonstrating how cultural-linguistic misalignment in Kenyan clinical settings introduces not just communicative, but emotional and medical risks, raising concerns about how politeness strategies may conflict with clarity in high-stakes environments.

5.2.4 Pregnancy in Informal Contexts

On the other end of the spectrum, informal speakers such as *boda boda* operators (motorcycle riders) and urban youth often employed more slang-like expressions. A common example was *akometewo* (she was hit) to mean a woman was pregnant. This euphemism, while vivid, exemplifies an off-record strategy, offering an indirect and humorous take on a sensitive topic. This euphemism lacked the emotional or cultural depth seen in elder speech. In one group discussion, a youth referred to a peer this way in the presence of older women, causing visible discomfort. The attempt at humor created misunderstanding and was perceived as disrespectful due to the absence of honorific framing. These dynamics reflect Gachanja (2006), who charted how shifting urban language erodes traditional respect markers. The study contribution lies in recording explicit reactions from both youth and elders, reminding us that humor can backfire across social divides.

5.2.5 Menstruation

The euphemism *nĩkuona nyoni* (to see the birds) emerged among younger female speakers as a discreet, light-hearted way to refer to menstruation within peer circles. Functioning as an off-record politeness strategy, the phrase allows speakers to indirectly reference a taboo subject while maintaining social harmony and avoiding embarrassment. This strategy showed that speakers often choose indirectness to protect face in socially sensitive domains. Within same-age peer groups, the euphemism promotes solidarity and ease, offering a shared linguistic code that fosters inclusion without explicitness.

However, when used across generational lines, particularly in the presence of older relatives or caregivers, the euphemism often fails to communicate its intended meaning. For elders unfamiliar with the metaphor, the phrase may be dismissed as frivolous or childish, resulting in misunderstanding or withdrawal of support. This breakdown in intergenerational communication reflects broader patterns of sociolinguistic stratification, where euphemistic codes are not evenly distributed or mutually intelligible across social groups. While Tchichie (2012) documented the proliferation of slang within Kenyan youth subcultures, the present study adds a crucial dimension by showing how such language choices, while functional within peer hierarchies, may inadvertently reinforce emotional and informational barriers in broader family or community settings. The finding underscores how euphemism functions not only as a linguistic device but also as a marker of social belonging, generational identity, and access to support systems, highlighting the fragility of intergenerational understanding in rapidly shifting linguistic landscapes.

5.2.6 Leadership and Taboo Speech

High-status individuals in the Gĩgĩcũgũ community, such as *Mũthamaki wa Mĩrũrĩ* (ruler of the clans), *Mũndũ wa Kĩrima* (person of the mountain), and *Kĩrĩmĩ kĩa Mũingĩ* (tongue of the people), exercised a unique linguistic privilege: the authority to address socially sensitive topics directly, though still mediated by euphemism. Their use of terms like *mũndũ wa mũgumo* (person of the sacred tree) to refer to someone under moral judgment or *mũndũ wa kĩa* (person of the council) to imply political or communal weight, employed negative politeness strategies that both preserved face and

invoked communal reverence. These euphemisms, while indirect, were highly context-specific and pragmatically loaded, signaling not only the speaker's moral seriousness but also their institutional legitimacy.

However, these euphemistic forms did not function equally across social hierarchies. When uttered by individuals of lower status or less institutional affiliation, the same phrases were often perceived as either presumptuous or inauthentic, disrupting the expected deference norms. This disparity points to an underlying stratification in euphemistic legitimacy, where access to euphemistic authority is tied to social prestige and not just linguistic competence. This finding builds on sociolinguistic theories of language and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), extending the debate by showing that euphemism itself is stratified, not only in terms of usage, but also in terms of who is permitted to use it without social penalty.

5.2.7 Modesty and Humility

This section applies negative politeness strategies where the youth and women, generally perceived as lower in the social hierarchy, navigated this reality using deferential euphemisms. Terms like *gũthĩnĩra* (to lower oneself), *gũthathaiya* (to plead respectfully), and *gũtĩrĩrĩka* (to show unwavering respect) were employed to negotiate space in public dialogue. In one observed case, a young man asked to address a community meeting by first referring to the elder present as *mũthuri wa kīama* (elder of the council). The euphemism signaled humility and acknowledgment of authority, allowing the younger speaker to gain permission to contribute. Here, the euphemism facilitated communication, yet only within the bounds of recognized social protocols. The findings complement Ramadhani & Jufrizal (2022), who studied politeness as a tool of social navigation in East Africa, adding a layer of how younger Gĩgĩcũgũ women and men negotiate voice through language humility.

5.2.8 Sickness

This section demonstrates the use of negative politeness and off-record strategies within stratified communicative contexts, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as terminal illness. In one recorded exchange, a younger relative described a terminal illness using *kũhũra ndawa* (to take medicine), while an elder corrected him with

kūrũara (to be unwell). The elder's correction, replacing *kũhũra ndawa* (to take medicine) with *kūrũara* (to be unwell), reflects a culturally sanctioned preference for euphemisms that align with emotional sensitivity and communal values of discretion. By opting for a more indirect and culturally resonant term, the elder avoids direct confrontation while maintaining communicative clarity and emotional appropriateness.

The younger speaker's phrasing, while factually accurate, lacks the culturally embedded nuance expected in high-stakes or emotionally delicate conversations. This gap illustrates how stratified language use is governed not merely by semantics but by sociocultural expectations of appropriateness and deference. Within broader pragmatic debates, this supports the argument that language choice, particularly euphemistic expression, is shaped by hierarchical roles and the necessity to manage face across generations (Holmes, 2013; Watts, 2003). The misalignment observed here is not simply a linguistic misunderstanding but a reflection of shifting norms in how illness is conceptualized and talked about across social tiers.

5.2.9 Employment and Economic Hardship

Euphemisms also masked economic hardship in ways that sometimes hindered problem-solving. Describing someone as *nĩ mĩndũ wa ciugo* (a man of many words) or *gũthooma na ithuii* (to go to school with us), both referring to idleness or unemployment, allowed speakers to avoid overt embarrassment. They reflect both negative politeness and off-record strategies. However, these terms often obscured the severity of the issue, delaying necessary interventions or misleading listeners unfamiliar with local idioms, especially among urban-based youth or development workers. While Putra & Widodo (2020) highlighted similar phenomena in formal debate settings, here we see the same masking effect in everyday Kenyan life, with potentially harmful consequences for intervention and support.

5.2.10 Rites of Passage and Community Mentoring

Data from Focus Group Discussions and elder interviews consistently revealed the use of euphemistic expressions such as *mũthenya wa gũtarwo* (the day when elders guide the youth) to refer to socially significant events like male circumcision, initiation ceremonies, and moral training sessions. This euphemism functions as an off-record

strategy, rooted in both positive politeness, invoking shared tradition and negative politeness, avoiding explicit references to sensitive topics. Elders used the term to maintain cultural decorum and uphold the gravity of the occasion without directly naming the rituals, especially in mixed company or public forums.

However, the data revealed consistent comprehension gaps. For example, during one rural workshop attended by both elders and secondary school youth, the elder facilitator referred to *mūthenya wa gūtarwo*, assuming the meaning was self-evident. Several youths later expressed confusion, with one male participant asking whether it referred to a general community meeting. Such instances of misinterpretation were not isolated; three separate interviews with young urban-raised participants showed that the phrase either held no meaning or was taken to imply a figurative day of advice, with no recognition of its role in signaling circumcision or initiation. These findings underscore a breakdown in cultural contextualization cues (Maitja, 2013), wherein the effectiveness of euphemism is contingent on shared socio-cultural knowledge.

While prior studies such as Tchichie (2012) noted the use of euphemism in youth mentorship, they did not critically examine the communicative risks posed when traditional terms are deployed without adequate cultural scaffolding. This study expands that discourse by evidencing specific instances of interpretive failure and tracing them to generational and geographical divides in access to traditional knowledge. Consequently, the use of *mūthenya wa gūtarwo*, though culturally rich, also reinforces social stratification, privileging those embedded in rural or elder discourse communities while excluding or confusing youth unfamiliar with encoded expressions.

5.2.11 Responsibilities and Honorifics

Honorific expressions like *mūndū wa mūtharaba* (person of the cross), *mūndū wa ng'undu* (person of the sacred land), and *kūheo mūrigo* (to be entrusted with a burden)-To be entrusted with responsibilities- were used in formal and communal contexts to express admiration subtly. These forms of positive politeness emphasized shared values and collective identity. However, their metaphorical nature sometimes led to ambiguity in inter-community settings or when used out of context, especially by speakers unfamiliar with their symbolic weight. This aligns with Gachanja (2006) who notes

how language reflects Kenya's evolving class dynamics but adds the understanding that honorific euphemisms can be lost or misrepresented outside familiar contexts.

Euphemistic speech in Gĩgĩcũgũ is both a bridge and a boundary, shaping respect and belonging, while sometimes excluding those outside established rituals of language. Social stratification demands certain roles speak in certain ways; misreading those can strain understanding, trust, even emotional connection. Drawing from previous studies, but also offering new ethnographic depth, this research highlights that understanding euphemism means understanding who is speaking, to whom, and in what social moment. Language is thus a living social map, and bridging gaps requires empathy, curiosity, and the patience to listen beneath the metaphor.

5.3 Cultural Beliefs

Euphemistic expressions in Gĩgĩcũgũ are born of deep cultural beliefs and taboos. They serve to soften sensitive topics such as death, illness, sexuality, infertility, menstruation and economic hardships, reflecting a community's desire to maintain respect, emotional balance, and spiritual harmony. However, as younger generations become increasingly shaped by global influences and shift away from traditional frameworks, these expressions can lose their clarity and resonance. What was once a shared cultural shorthand may now be met with confusion or misinterpretation. The following examples illustrate how these culturally grounded euphemisms function in practice, revealing both their communicative strength and their potential to obscure meaning across generational or situational divides.

5.3.1 Death and Spiritual Taboos

In Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community, references to death, particularly suicide or sudden loss, are often couched in euphemisms that prioritize cultural sensitivity, emotional restraint, and spiritual decorum. Elders and clergy commonly use the phrase *kũgũĩta ngoma* (sending back the spirit) to refer to suicide. This is an off-record euphemism that avoids direct mention of the act, thereby softening its emotional and spiritual weight. By framing suicide as a metaphysical return, the expression protects both the speaker's and hearers' negative face, allowing the topic to be acknowledged without imposing emotional distress or social stigma.

Similarly, the expression *kuuma kũĩ Ngai* (to come from God) is often used to indicate that someone has died. This euphemism draws on religious framing to emphasize divine will and continuity rather than finality. It reflects positive politeness in that it affirms shared cultural beliefs about life and the afterlife, offering comfort and emotional solidarity among community members. It also serves a face-saving function, especially for bereaved families, by preserving the dignity of the deceased and avoiding language that might be perceived as harsh or disrespectful.

However, while these expressions resonate with older generations who are embedded in the cultural and spiritual worldview they reflect, they often present challenges for younger, Western-educated speakers who are more accustomed to direct and explicit forms of communication. In one documented community meeting, a youth expressed confusion after hearing the phrase *ngũigua aĩ twamucokie ngoma* (I hear we returned them as a drum) used in reference to a suicide. Mistaking it for a comment about a traditional performance, the youth failed to grasp the emotional seriousness of the moment. This euphemism, intended to be gentle and respectful, inadvertently threatened the hearer's positive face by excluding them from the shared cultural code, resulting in a breakdown of emotional resonance and communal connection.

Such moments underscore how off-record euphemisms, though protective in intent, can obscure urgency and clarity when cultural continuity is disrupted. While Tchiechie (2012) and Malyuga and Rimmer (2023) have documented how metaphorical language reinforces group identity and social harmony, this study builds on their findings by revealing the communicative risks involved when euphemisms are used in intergenerational settings. Specifically, it shows how euphemisms about death may delay emotional connection or response, particularly when the face wants of younger participants, such as the need for clarity, emotional inclusion, and shared understanding, are not adequately addressed. In such cases, euphemisms that once served to protect communal dignity can unintentionally alienate or isolate, revealing a tension between cultural preservation and communicative effectiveness.

5.3.2 Menstruation

Euphemisms around menstruation and reproductive health reveal both generational divides and cultural sensitivities. Older women often use expressions such as *kūrugũira mĩthenya yake* (to open her days) to refer to menstruation. This indirect phrasing serves to maintain modesty, particularly in mixed company, and is culturally coded to align with ideals of discretion and womanly decorum.

However, this expression has led to confusion among some younger women unfamiliar with its metaphorical meaning. In one focus group, a nurse noted that adolescent girls often mistook the phrase for a reference to general illness or fatigue, leading to delayed conversations around menstrual health or emotional support. This mirrors findings by Hasyim et al. (2020), who observed that overly indirect metaphors in menstrual language, while intended to protect dignity, can sometimes obstruct understanding.

At the same time, younger speakers have developed their own euphemisms, such as *machiru* (name of woman, Wanjiru) and *mweri* (moon) which function as slang or discreet codes for menstruation. While these terms feel more immediate and accessible to the youth, they can confuse older women who are unacquainted with the emerging lexicon. One elder participant admitted she initially thought *machiru* was a nickname or a name of a person, not realizing it referred to a period.

This generational mismatch, where elders misunderstand youth slang and youth misinterpret traditional metaphors, underscores how euphemism can both bridge and break communication. It reveals how menstruation, though a universally experienced phenomenon among women, is differently spoken about across age groups, shaped by shifts in education, media exposure, and social openness. Ultimately, the evolving euphemisms around menstruation highlight the broader need for intergenerational dialogue, one that honors cultural codes while ensuring clarity, access to care, and emotional support for all.

5.3.3 Infertility and Emotional Distance

Infertility in Gĩgĩcũgũ is rarely addressed directly. Older women often use the euphemism *kũhuga gĩtina* (failing to anchor the back) to refer to a woman's inability to

conceive. This expression employs an off-record politeness strategy, using metaphor to preserve the emotional dignity of both speaker and referent. The phrase protects the woman's positive face, affirming her worth by avoiding a direct naming of infertility, which is often stigmatized. However, health practitioners report that such language complicates clinical consultations. In one hospital interview, a nurse described a patient who delayed seeking fertility treatment because she did not want to say the words plainly. The euphemism, though culturally respectful, contributed to the threatening of the speaker's negative face in a medical setting by obscuring the severity of the issue and limiting open dialogue. Ahmed and Jomaa (2022) found similar patterns in Middle Eastern contexts, where euphemism was used to protect private feelings but ultimately obstructed timely access to reproductive healthcare.

5.3.4 Illness, Crisis, and Urgency

Euphemisms concerning illness and critical health conditions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect often reflect attempts to manage emotional intensity while maintaining social harmony. The phrase *gũcoka gatagatĩ ka muoyo na gĩkuu* (returning between life and death) is typically used to describe someone in critical condition. This euphemism draws on off-record politeness, avoiding direct mention of mortality. It protects both speaker and listener from emotional overwhelm, upholding negative face by not imposing distressing information. However, in practice, this figurative framing can obscure the urgency of a medical situation. In one reported incident, a family delayed seeking emergency care for an elderly relative because they interpreted the phrase spiritually, as a sign of spiritual testing, rather than as an indicator of imminent danger.

Another common euphemism is *akoragwo na mũrimũ wa thĩĩnĩ* (he suffers from an internal sickness), often used to refer to terminal illnesses such as cancer. This reflects negative politeness, as it avoids causing emotional alarm, especially in social or non-clinical settings. It protects positive face by preserving the dignity of the patient and avoiding explicit reference to a stigmatized illness. However, when such phrases are used without clear clinical context, they may lead to underreporting of symptoms or misinterpretation of severity. A health worker interviewed in the study noted that families often avoid using the word "cancer" altogether, preferring euphemisms that feel safer. Putra and Widodo (2020) found a similar pattern in Javanese discourse,

where idiomatic language protected social harmony but created gaps in health communication.

5.3.5 Social Boundaries in Conflict and Rejection

Politeness strategies in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect are also evident in expressions used to navigate interpersonal conflict, flirtation, and social distancing. Euphemisms such as *tūtibakagwa macūrũ* (we are not smeared porridge) are commonly used by women to reject flirtatious or inappropriate advances. This phrase employs a negative politeness strategy by expressing refusal indirectly, thereby minimizing confrontation and preserving both the speaker's and hearer's face. It functions to assert personal boundaries without directly humiliating the other party. However, in some cases, younger men misinterpret it as playful or non-serious. One participant recounted how his attempt at flirting was brushed off with this phrase, which he initially perceived as a joke rather than a firm rejection, highlighting how euphemism may backfire when not interpreted within the right cultural frame.

Similarly, *ndigithia* (leave me alone) is frequently used to de-escalate tension or disengage from an emotionally charged situation. While it may appear blunt, in local contexts it reflects off-record and negative politeness strategies, asserting space without aggressive confrontation. It allows the speaker to reclaim autonomy while avoiding direct face-threatening acts. However, among individuals unfamiliar with its cultural nuance, the expression may be read as cold or dismissive, which in turn threatens the hearer's positive face, particularly in emotionally sensitive interactions. Kapron-King and Xu (2021) observed that such conversational repairs rely heavily on shared cultural norms to succeed; the Gĩgĩcũgũ data echoes this, showing that euphemisms used to maintain social distance can unintentionally hinder clarity or emotional understanding when interpretive frames differ.

5.3.6 Honorifics and Spiritual Authority

Conversely, positive politeness is enacted through honorific euphemisms that emphasize shared identity, respect, and group cohesion. Phrases such as *Kĩrathimo kĩa Mũciĩ* (blessing of the home), *Gĩthathi kĩa Mũingĩ* (symbol of unity), and *Gĩthioro kĩa Mũmbĩ* (voice of the creator) are often used to refer to esteemed community members

in formal gatherings. These expressions not only elevate the addressee's social standing but also reinforce communal values and a shared worldview. Similarly, religious or spiritual euphemisms like *Mūgumo wa Ngai* (God's sacred tree), *Kīrūgū kīa Ngai* (God's sacred path), and *Mūciari wa Ngai* (parent blessed by God) are used to frame leadership, parenthood, and divine blessing in metaphorical language that commands respect.

In ceremonial contexts, elders and spiritual leaders are often introduced with layered euphemisms such as *Mūgī wa Mīrūrī* (wise one of the clans), *Gīthioro kīa Mūingī* (voice of the community), or *Kīama kīa Ng'ethe* (council of harmony). These expressions are culturally resonant, signaling both the speaker's and listener's alignment with traditional values. Their use achieves multiple politeness goals, honoring status, minimizing imposition, and affirming group membership.

However, younger participants in group discussions reported that such phrases often sounded archaic or obscure, especially when used outside ritual or formal gatherings. One youth expressed confusion when an elder referred to a respected woman as *Kīrūgū kīa Mūciī* (path of the homestead), misinterpreting it as a comment about her physical home rather than her familial and moral leadership. This reflects a broader issue: as cultural grounding erodes, euphemisms that once unified may now divide. Mwangi (2013) and Ramadhani & Jufrizal (2022) noted that titles reinforce hierarchy; here, this research highlights how their meaning can fade with cultural distance.

Moreover, the cultural expectation of *gūthĩnjĩra* (to honor or pay homage) and *gūkunia* (to show deference or humility) remains central in how younger speakers approach conversations with elders. While these gestures uphold the cultural value of respect, they often result in constrained or overly cautious communication. In several observed interactions, younger speakers hesitated to ask direct questions about illness, relationships, or community decisions out of fear of appearing disrespectful. This deference, while rooted in positive politeness, limited the flow of vital information, creating barriers to full participation and decision-making.

5.3.7 Emotional Health and Stoicism

The euphemism *kūrĩa mūtwe*, literally “to eat the head” is commonly understood in Gĩgĩcũgũ and broader Gĩkũyũ discourse to mean “to think deeply” or “to reflect in silence.” In traditional contexts, it is often used to describe someone who is quietly dealing with problems, possibly weighing important decisions. For example, a parent might say: *Mwana ũcio nĩarĩa mūtwe mũno thaa ici* (That child has been eating their head a lot lately) to suggest the child is lost in thought or internally troubled.

While this euphemism conveys stoicism and introspection, it may also obscure emotional or psychological distress. In contemporary settings, particularly among the youth or in mental health conversations, such phrases can fail to alert caregivers or peers to deeper issues like anxiety or depression. What is meant to reflect quiet contemplation may in fact be a sign of emotional suffering, misunderstood or overlooked due to the euphemistic framing.

One adolescent participant shared that when struggling with school-related anxiety, she was often told by elders: *Wĩ mũthuuri, tondũ wĩ kūrĩa mūtwe nĩwega* (You are mature; it's good that you're just eating your head). Here, the euphemism functioned as praise for self-control, not recognizing it as a possible sign of isolation or suppressed emotional pain. This demonstrates how cultural ideals of emotional restraint can prevent timely support or intervention.

While *kūrĩa mūtwe* is generally recognized across most Kikuyu dialects, its interpretation and emotional weight may vary. In Gĩgĩcũgũ or Mathira dialects, for instance, similar phrases exist but may carry slightly different connotations or be used less frequently in discussions of emotional well-being. That said, among Gĩgĩcũgũ speakers, the focus of this study, the phrase retains strong social value as a marker of maturity and discretion.

However, as societal attitudes toward mental health evolves, the continued use of such euphemisms raises important questions. Does it still serve its protective function, or does it risk suppressing necessary dialogue? This aligns with Sharafutdinov (2024), who found that euphemistic idioms in Slavic cultures often masked emotional

vulnerability, delaying help-seeking behavior. Similarly, this study suggests that without contextual clarity and cultural translation, especially across generations, euphemisms like *kūrīa mūtwe* may no longer serve emotional health, but hinder it.

5.3.8 Subtle Critique, Behavior, and Resource Use

Euphemisms in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect are also used to manage social critiques, particularly around behavior and resource consumption, in ways that uphold communal harmony. The expression *kūrīa ngai* (to partake in a meal) is often employed instead of directly accusing someone of eating greedily or overindulging. This euphemism represents an off-record politeness strategy, where the speaker avoids confrontation by using a vague or less judgmental phrase. It protects the positive face of the person being referred to by framing the behavior in a socially acceptable, even reverent, manner, associating eating with a spiritual or communal act rather than gluttony.

However, this linguistic softening can obscure behaviors that may require direct address. In one observed communal setting, a participant who consistently took disproportionate portions during group meals was described using the phrase *nĩarĩa ngai nene muno* (he partook greatly of God’s food). While humorous and tactful, the euphemism prevented others from confronting the issue directly, ultimately threatening the group’s collective negative face by allowing resentment to accumulate without resolution. Malyuga and Rimmer (2023) have noted that culturally-loaded idioms often function as tools for soft social regulation; however, this study builds on that observation by showing how their regulatory impact weakens when euphemism replaces direct accountability in practical contexts such as food distribution or shared resources.

A similar dynamic is evident in the phrase *kũhũra mũrango* (to knock the door), which is used as a culturally polite way to describe someone who interrupts or enters without invitation. The euphemism draws on a metaphor of courteous approach and is a form of negative politeness, intended to protect the speaker from seeming accusatory while preserving the hearer’s positive face by framing their behavior as potentially well-intentioned. However, in practice, it can dilute the seriousness of the disruption.

In one educational context, a teacher used the phrase to describe a student who repeatedly entered classes late and unannounced. The metaphorical framing led the student to assume their behavior was tolerable, rather than disruptive. Here, the euphemism failed to communicate a clear behavioral boundary, as it depended on shared cultural knowledge that the student, possibly from a different dialect background, did not fully grasp. The politeness strategy, while culturally respectful, compromised clarity, especially in a multilingual or intercultural setting where expectations about space, timing, and deference may vary. These examples demonstrate that while euphemisms like *kūrīa ngai* and *kūhūra mūrango* are crafted to reduce social tension and uphold interpersonal dignity, their effectiveness relies on shared cultural scripts. When those scripts are disrupted, by generational change, context, or linguistic diversity, the euphemisms may lose their subtle corrective force and, instead, obscure the need for honest communication.

5.3.9 Idleness and Substance Use

Euphemisms on idleness and substance use are not isolated; they reflect broader cultural beliefs about propriety, deference, and respect. Expressions such as *kūgĩa na mūnyaka* (to have a moment), *Kūrīa mūkūyũ* (to eat a fig), and *kūhūra mūtũrĩ* (to strike a path) are used to describe idleness or wandering without directly condemning it. This indirectness is culturally valued for its politeness, but it can also lead to underestimating the seriousness of socio-economic challenges such as youth unemployment or substance abuse. For example, *kūhūra njohi* (to taste beer) may refer to drinking alcohol but masks habitual or excessive consumption. This euphemism can blur the line between casual drinking and problematic behavior, limiting the possibility of open conversations around alcohol use and its social effects.

Contrary to the findings of Tchieche (2012), who emphasized the didactic and moralistic functions of Gĩkũyũ euphemism, treating these expressions as tools of cultural instruction and ethical reinforcement, this study reveals how euphemism can obscure rather than illuminate. Tchieche offered a largely descriptive account, cataloguing euphemistic expressions within Gĩkũyũ proverbs and idioms but did not sufficiently address the potential for miscommunication or socio-cultural dissonance.

This study instead aligns more closely with and extends the work of Njoroge (2014), who explored euphemisms in the context of ritual and governance. Njoroge highlighted how terms such as *gūcokia rui mūkaro* (returning the river to its course) and *gūthĩnjĩra* (to honor or pay homage) function in affirming social order and respect for hierarchy. Building on her foundation, this thesis explores how these expressions are being reinterpreted in modern contexts. For instance, *gūcokia rui mūkaro* has found renewed usage in political discourse to symbolize the restoration of justice or institutional reform, though not without contestation. Likewise, *gūkunia*, traditionally used to express humility and reverence, may now be critiqued by younger generations as a symbol of excessive submission in a more individualistic and rights-conscious society.

It was therefore noted that euphemisms in Gĩgĩcũgũ serve as both protective shields and communicative hurdles. They uphold traditional values and social order through politeness strategies that mitigate face-threatening acts. Yet, their reliance on shared cultural knowledge makes them vulnerable to misinterpretation, especially in intergenerational or cross-cultural exchanges. As the linguistic distance between traditional and modern speakers widens, euphemism increasingly risks becoming a source of confusion rather than cohesion. The findings point to an urgent need for culturally sensitive yet clear communication practices, especially in contexts like health, education, and intergenerational dialogue where ambiguity can have real-world consequences.

5.4 Gender-Based Euphemisms and Communication Barriers

In the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, euphemisms are not only tools for softening speech, but also deeply embedded in the speaker's gendered experience and socialization. Men and women often adopt different euphemistic codes when discussing sensitive or taboo topics, such as menstruation, sexual health, or emotional vulnerability. These gendered expressions are shaped by societal expectations around speech, modesty, and emotional restraint. While effective within gender-homogeneous groups, they can lead to misunderstandings or communication breakdowns in mixed-gender interactions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory is useful in explaining these patterns. It shows how speakers employ strategies to manage face and maintain harmony. However, when speakers do not share the same socio-pragmatic norms, such as

between men and women, these strategies can backfire, leading to confusion or perceived rudeness.

5.4.1 Euphemisms Among Female Speakers

Among female speakers in the Gĩgĩcũgũ community, euphemisms serve as a deliberate communicative strategy, often grounded in negative politeness, the desire to avoid imposition, preserve personal space, and minimize embarrassment. This is especially evident in how women refer to menstruation, a topic that remains socially sensitive. Rather than using direct or clinical terms, women employ euphemistic expressions that rely on metaphor, indirection, and shared cultural knowledge to discuss menstruation respectfully and discreetly.

For example, expressions like *ming'una ya Mũthoni* (Mũthoni's days) and *kũrugũũra mũthenya yake* (opening her days) are commonly used among women to refer to the menstrual cycle. These phrases not only conceal the physiological reality but also allow speakers to maintain emotional distance and avoid discomfort in public or mixed-company conversations. Another commonly used phrase is *nĩkuona nyoni* (she has seen birds), which subtly signals menstruation while retaining a layer of ambiguity accessible mainly to insiders.

Other euphemisms such as *kabinda ka mweri* (time of the month), *kuona mweri* (to see the moon), *gucererwo* (to be visited), and *ageni a mweri* (monthly visitors) are similarly coded, using metaphorical or symbolic language to signal the menstrual period without directly naming it. These expressions typically function within female-only spaces or supportive environments like women's groups, informal gatherings, or health talks, where shared understanding allows for emotional safety and rapport-building. The reliance on shared metaphor ensures discretion while reinforcing a sense of collective identity among women, who use these terms not only to avoid shame but also to affirm mutual cultural knowledge.

These euphemisms are not merely linguistic flourishes but are actively taught and maintained. In one focus group, an older woman recalled being instructed from a young age: "*You don't say it plainly. That would be shameful, especially around men or elders.*"

Even we were taught to say we are seeing the birds." This reflects an inherited etiquette around bodily discourse, illustrating how euphemism enacts cultural values of modesty and respect, core aspects of negative politeness.

However, the evidence also shows that while euphemisms can foster solidarity and discretion among women, they may result in communicative breakdowns across gendered or intergenerational boundaries. In one observed incident, a young woman used the phrase *kuona nyoni* during a mixed-gender group discussion. A male participant interrupted to ask what the phrase meant, unintentionally embarrassing the speaker. While his question reflected genuine curiosity rather than disrespect, it exposed the limits of euphemism as a protective strategy when interlocutors are not privy to its coded meaning.

These findings resonate with the work of Zhu et al. (2021), who analyzed metaphoric language surrounding menstruation in Chinese communities. They found that such language provides emotional safety for women but may exclude or confuse unintended listeners. The current study extends this understanding by situating euphemism within the African context of Gĩgĩcũgũ, where the stakes of modesty, respect, and face-saving are closely tied to social harmony and linguistic tradition.

5.4.2 Euphemisms Among Male Speakers

Male speakers in the Gĩgĩcũgũ community tend to use euphemisms that prioritize status, solidarity, and emotional control, often employing positive politeness or off-record strategies to maintain group cohesion and masculine face. While women's euphemisms tend to shield vulnerability through modesty and discretion, men's euphemisms often reframe vulnerability as shared experience or humor, thus preserving face in contexts where direct admission might threaten masculine identity.

For instance, during a group discussion on male circumcision and initiation, one younger participant, rather than admitting to fear, asked, *Nyĩrĩ awa?* (Is this deep?). Though the phrase appears as a neutral question, it functioned as an off-record euphemism, a way to express fear indirectly without owning it fully. The laughter that followed among peers suggested recognition of the underlying meaning, allowing him

to acknowledge vulnerability while still appearing composed. In this context, euphemism softens a face-threatening act (FTA) by diffusing it through ambiguity and humor.

Similarly, in discussions about sexual inadequacy or financial instability, topics that pose a high risk to masculine face, men relied on shared metaphors and inside jokes. Phrases such as *gũtikũra wira* (no running from work) and *kwenda mũthenya wa rũraya* (loving the day in Europe)- referring to waiting endlessly or having no money, allow men to address hardship without explicitly acknowledging failure. These euphemisms deploy positive politeness, appealing to group identity and mutual understanding. They often surface in all-male conversations where vulnerability is masked by performative resilience, humor, or even bravado.

Other euphemisms include *mũgwi* (arrow) and *itimũ* (spear), both used to refer obliquely to male genitalia. Their metaphorical framing allows men to talk about masculinity in ways that are culturally coded and status-affirming. For example, in one discussion about fertility, a speaker jokingly said, "*Ndĩ na itimũ igũrũ*" (I have a spear held high), eliciting laughter and expressions of approval from peers. Here, positive politeness is again at play, his identity as a capable man is reinforced, and camaraderie is maintained. These terms enable men to express potentially face-threatening information like sexual performance and health in ways that preserve pride and align with peer expectations.

However, the effectiveness of these euphemisms is highly context-dependent. In cross-gender interactions, the same language often becomes problematic. One female participant recounted a conversation where her partner used *gũtikũra wira* during a discussion about financial planning. She recalled, "*He just said 'gũtikũra wira,' and I had to ask three times what he meant. It felt like he was joking about something serious.*" In this case, the euphemism, intended to minimize discomfort or deflect embarrassment, failed to meet the emotional seriousness of the moment, inadvertently threatening the woman's positive face, her need to feel heard, respected, and emotionally engaged.

These gendered speech patterns align with findings by Hu et al. (2025), who observed that male euphemisms in urban East Africa often serve to protect masculine dignity through indirection and shared in-group codes. What this study adds is the observation that while such euphemisms function effectively within male peer groups, they can also exclude or alienate female interlocutors, particularly in emotionally charged discussions, where shared understanding cannot be assumed and face needs differ sharply between genders. This mismatch in communicative expectations can lead to relational tension, as euphemistic indirection may be interpreted as emotional avoidance or lack of accountability, undermining interpersonal trust

5.4.3 Communication Barriers in Mixed-Gender Contexts

The use of gender-specific euphemisms, while effective within gendered settings, often creates communication friction in mixed-gender contexts. The meanings behind these expressions are shaped by shared social experiences and cultural codes that are not always accessible to outsiders, even within the same community. In FGDs, both male and female participants recalled moments of awkwardness or confusion stemming from euphemistic use. Men reported feeling lost or "left out" when women used symbolic language around topics like menstruation or reproductive health. Women, on the other hand, expressed frustration at what they perceived as men downplaying emotional or serious issues through vague or playful euphemisms. This mismatch in expectations highlights a pragmatic disconnect between how different genders manage politeness and face. What is seen as respectful and careful by one group may be viewed as evasive or unclear by another.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework supports this, emphasizing that politeness strategies are context-sensitive and reliant on shared understanding, a condition that is often missing in cross-gender euphemistic exchanges. These findings suggest that euphemism, while a powerful communicative tool, also reflects deeper social divisions in how men and women are taught to speak, feel, and relate. Understanding the gendered nuances of euphemistic language in Gĩgĩcũgũ not only enriches our knowledge of politeness theory but also underscores the need for more inclusive communication strategies in shared spaces. This observation therefore supports Munyiri's (2006) findings on Kikuyu gendered speech norms, where men and women

often operate within separate euphemistic registers. The current research builds on this by highlighting how these registers rarely align in mixed-gender conversations as shown in table 6. As a result, instead of easing communication, euphemisms can create confusion or silence around sensitive topics. Consider the data in the following table.

Table 6: Gender-Based Euphemisms and their Communicative Functions

Speaker Gender	Euphemism	Literal Meaning	Context of Use	Politeness Strategy	Communication Effect
Female	<i>ming'una ya mũthoni</i>	Time of the woman	Menstruation	Negative politeness	Cause misunderstanding in male-female dialogue
	<i>Kũrugũũra mĩthenya yake</i>	To open her days			
	<i>Nĩkuona nyoni</i>	To see birds			
Male	<i>nyĩrĩ awa?</i>	Is this deep?	Fear expressed indirectly	Positive politeness/ face saving	Perceived as evasive by female listeners
	<i>gũtikũra wira</i>	the work refused waiting	Financial struggle		
	<i>kwenda mũthenya wa rũraya</i>	for a day like Europe	Financial Struggle		

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to achieve two main objectives: to examine how politeness strategies are employed through euphemized expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect, and to determine the extent to which these expressions contribute to communication challenges resulting from generational and cultural shifts. The findings reveal that euphemisms are not merely linguistic substitutions but are deeply embedded in the community's cultural norms and communicative practices. Their strategic use reflects underlying values related to respect, modesty, and social cohesion.

Euphemistic expressions were found to be particularly prevalent in socially sensitive areas such as health, sexuality, excretion, death, initiation rites, and marriage. In these domains, speakers relied on euphemism as a tool to maintain politeness, uphold taboos, and soften potentially distressing realities. These expressions functioned in alignment with Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, reflecting both positive politeness strategies, such as creating solidarity, and negative politeness strategies, such as avoiding directness to prevent offense.

The research also uncovered marked generational differences in the use and understanding of euphemisms. Older speakers tended to use traditional euphemisms with ease, while younger generations, shaped by urbanization, exposure to different cultural influences, and formal education, often lacked familiarity with these expressions. As a result, communication breakdowns occurred in intergenerational contexts, not due to deliberate disregard but due to evolving perceptions of appropriateness and respectful speech.

These generational variations point to a broader conflict between the preservation of traditional linguistic forms and the pressures of cultural change. While older generations continue to prioritize indirectness and cultural taboos, younger speakers lean toward directness, reflecting changing social norms and communicative expectations. This shift highlights the fragile balance between language continuity and adaptation in dynamic sociocultural environments.

Ultimately, the findings emphasize that euphemism in Gĩgĩcũgũ serves multiple communicative functions: it facilitates respectful interaction, promotes emotional sensitivity, enforces moral codes, and preserves face. Its use demonstrates how language operates as a cultural mechanism for managing social relationships and negotiating meaning. The study confirms the importance of context-based politeness frameworks in understanding linguistic behavior and offers a foundation for future research on euphemism in African languages as a tool for expressing identity, respect, and social values.

6.2 Conclusion

The study demonstrates that euphemism in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect is a vital lexico-pragmatic strategy intricately tied to the community's cultural norms and social expectations. Rather than being random or ornamental, these expressions reflect a shared understanding of politeness, indirectness, and face-saving, principles central to Politeness Theory. By grounding the analysis in a culturally specific context, the study offers a nuanced contribution to both lexico-pragmatic inquiry and African sociolinguistics, challenging universalist assumptions and highlighting the diversity of communicative practices. Importantly, the observed decline in euphemism use among younger speakers signals broader sociolinguistic shifts and raises concerns about the transmission of indigenous linguistic knowledge. This underscores the value of documenting such forms not only as linguistic artifacts but as living expressions of cultural identity and intergenerational connection.

6.3 Recommendations of the Study

In light of the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- i. Curriculum integration of indigenous pragmatics: Educational establishments should think about including local pragmatic knowledge into language and culture classes, particularly those located in areas where Gĩgĩcũgũ is spoken. This can promote respect for conventional forms of expression and aid in bridging generational divides.
- ii. Community-based language revitalization programs: To guarantee that euphemistic terms are maintained for next generations, local cultural and linguistic organizations should actively record them together with their

pragmatic purposes.

- iii. Media and cultural programming: By incorporating traditional euphemisms into radio, theater, and storytelling, local media outlets may contribute to the popularization of these terms and support linguistic and cultural continuity.
- iv. Intergenerational dialogue forums: By promoting communication between younger and older speakers, these platforms can help spread euphemistic language, improving understanding between speakers and lowering pragmatic misconceptions.

6.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

While this study provides foundational insights into the lexico-pragmatic use of euphemisms in Gĩgĩcũgũ, it also opens up avenues for future research:

- i. Comparative studies across dialects: To find more general regional tendencies, future scholars can investigate how euphemism works in other Kikuyu dialects or comparable Bantu languages.
- ii. Quantitative methods to pragmatic competence: To measure generational competency in euphemistic usage and provide more quantifiable insights about language change, future research might use a mixed-method approach.
- iii. Gender-based pragmatic techniques within the dialect may be revealed by examining the ways in which men and women utilize euphemisms differently.
- iv. Impact of digital communication: As digital media increasingly mediates communication, it would be valuable to explore how online platforms influence the use, adaptation, or decline of euphemistic expressions in indigenous languages.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: A Lexico-Pragmatic Interpretation of Gi-Gicugu Euphemism

Principal Investigator: Miriam Wangui Maguh

Supervisors: Prof. Christine Atieno and Dr. Elijah Chege

Institutional Affiliation: Chuka University

Purpose of the Study

This research seeks to examine how euphemisms function in Gĩgĩcũgũ, particularly in sensitive or socially complex situations. The study has two key objectives:

1. To analyze how politeness strategies are embedded in euphemistic expressions to convey meaning across different social settings within the Gĩgĩcũgũ community.
2. To investigate how euphemistic expressions in the Gĩgĩcũgũ dialect may lead to communication challenges, especially across generational, social, and cultural lines.

What Your Participation Involves

If you choose to participate in this study:

- You will be invited to join a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) where you and a small group of participants will discuss common euphemisms used in everyday communication.
- You may also be observed or recorded naturally in informal, day-to-day settings (such as storytelling, casual conversations, or cultural gatherings) where euphemistic expressions are likely to occur.
- All sessions may be audio-recorded for accuracy in analysis, but only with your permission.

Each FGD will last approximately 60–90 minutes, and any natural recordings will be conducted with care, without disrupting normal interactions

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline or withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences. You may also decline to be recorded or request to stop a recording at any moment.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Your privacy and dignity are very important to us.

- Your name and identity will not appear in any research report or publication.
- Audio recordings will be securely stored and only accessed by the researcher and supervisors.
- Any examples used in the study will be anonymized to protect your identity.

Risks and Benefits

There are no physical or emotional risks anticipated in this study. While there may be no direct benefit to you, your participation will contribute greatly to the preservation and understanding of Gĩgĩcũgũ language and culture. It may also help improve communication across generations within the community.

Compensation

There will be no financial payment for your participation, but your time, knowledge, and contribution are genuinely appreciated.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns at any point, please feel free to contact:

Miriam Wangui Maguh

Email: maguhmiriam@gmail.com

Phone: +24718083756

Consent Declaration

Please tick the appropriate boxes:

- ☐ I have read and understood the information above.
- ☐ I agree to participate in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD).
- ☐ I agree to be audio-recorded during the discussion.
- ☐ I consent to being recorded in natural settings where euphemisms occur.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion

Field Guide for Conducting a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

This appendix presents the set of questions used to guide FGDs with participants from different age and gender groups within the Gĩgĩcũgũ-speaking community. The questions were designed to explore how euphemisms are used, interpreted, and understood across generations. They reflect the sociolinguistic themes the researcher intended to examine in a group setting. Participants were grouped by age and gender to encourage naturalistic interaction and reduce power dynamics that might inhibit speech.

FGD Guide Structure for Collecting Data on Gĩgĩcũgũ Euphemisms

A. Introduction

Greet participants warmly

Introduce yourself and the purpose of the study

Assure confidentiality and anonymity

Request permission to record

Explain the format: "This is a discussion, not a test. There are no right or wrong answers."

B. Warm-Up Question

“What are some things people in this community avoid saying directly?”

“Why do people sometimes use indirect words?”

C. Main Questions by Topic

The researcher will adjust depending on the FGD's focus area.

1. Circumcision

What terms are commonly used to talk about circumcision without being too direct?

Why do people avoid direct terms?

2. Childbirth

How do people talk about pregnancy or childbirth indirectly?

Which are the different terms for different audiences (e.g., elders vs. peers) on childbirth?

3. Sex and Relationships

What terms do people use to refer to sex or romantic relationships indirectly?

How do euphemisms help avoid embarrassment or offense?

4. Church Activities

Which are the words avoided in religious spaces?

How do church leaders or members use euphemism to talk about sensitive topics?

5. Weddings/Marriage

What euphemisms are used when talking about marriage, dowry, or marital issues?

D. Wrap-Up Questions

Why do you think people prefer euphemisms in Gĩgĩcũgũ?

Which are the different types of euphemisms used by younger people today?

E. During the FGD

Be neutral and friendly

Encourage everyone to speak

Let discussion flow naturally, don't rush it

Probe gently: "Can you give an example?" / "What do you mean by that?"

Take notes, even if you're recording

Observe body language and group dynamics

F. After the FGD

Thank the participants sincerely

Store the notes and recordings securely

Reflect immediately by jotting down any key observations

Transcribe the audio as soon as possible (preferably the same day or next)

Appendix 3: Natural Recording Data Collection Table

This appendix outlines the type of information the researcher aimed to capture through naturalistic audio recordings. These recordings were made during everyday interactions in informal settings such as marketplaces and social gatherings, with a focus on how euphemisms occur in spontaneous, unprompted speech.

FIELD GUIDE FOR NATURALISTIC RECORDING

Observation Detail:	Information Captured
Recording ID:	e.g, Aud_2044701
Date:	e.g, 26/07/2025
Time:	e.g 1400hrs
Location:	e.g., Village/Church/Home – where observation occurred
Event Type:	e.g., Church service, Wedding, Childbirth gathering, Circumcision ceremony
Speaker(s):	Age, gender, social role e.g., Male elder, ~65 years, church leader
Target Audience:	e.g., Youth, mixed congregation, women group, etc.
Euphemism Used:	Phrase in Gĩgĩcũgũ e.g., “ <i>kũrĩa thĩĩnĩ wa nguo</i> ”
Literal Meaning:	e.g., “eating under the clothes”
Cultural/Intended Meaning:	e.g., Refers to sexual activity
Lexical Strategy:	Metaphor, idiom, circumlocution, compounding, etc.
Pragmatic Function:	e.g., Politeness, indirectness, taboo avoidance, face-saving
Audience Reaction:	Laughter, silence, nodding, murmurs, gestures, etc.
Non-verbal Cues:	e.g., Gestures, tone, facial expression, pauses, etc.
Contextual Notes:	Any relevant cultural info or setting description to aid in interpretation

Appendix 4: Transcribed Euphemisms

This appendix contains selected excerpts from transcriptions of both the FGDs and naturalistic recordings. The data capture how euphemisms were used in real speech across different social settings. Transcriptions were anonymized and lightly edited for clarity while preserving the original linguistic features and intent.

1. Death and Dying

kūmugira kwaheri – to say goodbye

kūburūka – to rest

kūthi kwi Ngai / kūthi matwini / kūthi igurū / kuthii Sayuni – to go to God / sky / Zion

kūmathima – to measure them

kūthika – to bury

kūruta kiria kiuma nda – to remove what was in the stomach (related to miscarriage/stillbirth)

mwico wa rugendo/thabari – end of the journey

toro wa tene na tene / toro wa mindi na mindi – permanent sleep

mathaa make ma gūkua – the hour of death

kūthira – to finish

ngwacĩ – sweet potato (sometimes used metaphorically in funeral speeches)

mbĩrĩra / enji a mbĩrĩra – grave / grave diggers

abarĩria a ĩrima / acimbi a ĩrima – those preparing or digging the grave

2. Illness, Disability, and Health

mũrimu / mũrimu uyu – illness / this disease

mũrimu wa gatagati – disease of the center (often mental illness)

mũrimu wa thiri – secret disease (often terminal illness or HIV/AIDS)

mũrimu wa thĩĩnĩ – internal sickness (cancer)

Mũkingo – HIV/AIDS

mũrimu wa thirikari – government disease (HIV/AIDS euphemism)

mũrimu wa ũmamari – disease of promiscuity

kũrũara – to be unwell

homa – common cold

gichũĩ – itch

gichununu, gatego – trap (used metaphorically for disease or danger)

gūkua – to die

gũcoka gatagatĩ ka muoyo na gikuu – returning between life and death

kugũa igũrũ na magũrũ ta nyoni – to fall from the sky with legs like a bird (sudden death)

3. Sexuality, Reproduction, and Intimacy

guitukwo – orgasm

gūkua – to die (can also metaphorically relate to orgasm in some contexts)
muthinu/muthiita – penis
mbīnī / kanyee / kiino – vagina
huyo – pubic hair
mbegu cia arūme – seeds of men (sperm)
gwītethia – to help oneself (masturbation)
gwikana / kuriana – to do each other / to eat each other (sex)
kūrīa thīnī wa nguo – to eat inside the clothes (sexual intercourse)
kanyamoo / kinyamoo – small/big thing (genitals)
mūtumia – one who keeps secrets (a woman, used euphemistically)
mumaraya / githaria – prostitute (male or female)
mūkoma thū – unmarried mother (socially coded reference)
kanyūngū – pot (vagina metaphor)

4. Bodily Functions and Hygiene

kūmīa – to defecate
kūthuguma – to urinate
kūthūkia riera – to spoil the air (farting)
kūthuria / kūthiota / ndore – flatulence
kabinda kanene / kabinda kanini – long call / short call (urination/defecation)
kūmama / gukoma – to sleep (can also mean death)
mai / ngindo – feces
tūtibakagwa macūrū – we are not smeared porridge (used humorously to reference diarrhea)

5. Pregnancy, Menstruation, and Childbirth

ibinda riu ria mweri / kabinda ka mweri / ageni a mweri – that period of the month / monthly visitors
indo cia mūtumia / ming'una ya Mūthoni – woman's things / Mūthoni's days
kuuma na magūrū matano – to leave with five legs (childbirth)
kūgīa mwana / kūbewa mwana / kūgia nda – to bear a child / to be given a baby / to get a stomach
ihu / ee na nda / nī mūrīto / nī mūkūu – pregnant
thigiri – placenta
njīra ya ūciari – birth canal
kūruta kiria kiuma nda – to remove what was in the stomach
akometewo – she was hit (used to reference complications)

6. Poverty and Social Status

mūthini – a poor person
ndena kanyamu – has nothing
kwaga mbeba / mbia – to lack money
kūnyitwo – to be taken (can imply abduction or poverty-driven departure)

mūndū wa kīama / wa mūgumo / wa ng'undu / wa mūtharaba / wa ngoma – coded descriptions of spiritual or social affiliations
wĩ mūthuuri, tondũ wĩ kūrĩa mūtwe – You are mature; it's good that you're just eating your head (used sarcastically to comment on behavior)

7. Work, Education, and Politics

gūtikūra wira – no running from work
gūthooma na ithuii – to go to school with us
kūratha / kũhanda – to shoot / to wake (metaphors for political or revolutionary action)
Kīama kīa Ng'ethe / Mūthamaki wa Mīrūrī – council of harmony / ruler of the clans
Gĩthathi kīa Mūingĩ / Gĩthioro kīa Mūingĩ / Gĩthioro kīa Mūmbĩ – voice of the people / unity / creator
Mūgĩ wa Mīrūrī – wise one of the clans

8. Religion and Spirituality

kũthi kwi Ngai / kuuma kūrĩ Ngai – going to or from God
Mūciari wa Ngai – parent blessed by God
Kīrūgũ kīa Ngai – God's sacred path
Mūgumo wa Ngai – God's sacred tree
kuuma kwĩ Ngai – death or divine origin

9. Taboo or Humor-Infused Speech

kūrĩa mūtwe / kuona nyoni – to eat the head / to see birds
kimemendi – the destroyer (HIV/AIDS)
kang'ura / kagego – clitoris
mūrume – the one who eats or bites (man/lover)
mutinu wa uriri / gitanda – bed accident (sexual connotation)
kūhuga gītina – failing to anchor the back (impotence or irresponsibility)
ntheke / nyee / heke / ndendere – testicles (humorous variations)

Appendix 5: Introductory Letter



Knowledge is Wealth (*Sapientia divitia est*) Akili ni Mali

**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

Telephones: 020-2310512/18
Direct Line: 020-268 7625

postgraduate@chuka.ac.ke

P. O. Box 109-60400, Chuka
Website: www.chuka.ac.ke

REF: AM13/39852/18

24th June, 2025

**Director
National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation
Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete
P O Box 30623, 00100
Nairobi.**

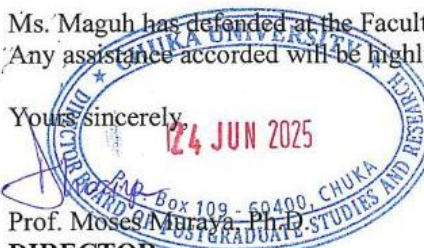
Dear Sir / Madam,

RE:MIRIAM WANGUI MAGUH

The above-named person is a bona fide student of Chuka University pursuing Masters in English language and Linguistics proposal titled: **A Lexico-pragmatic Interpretation of Gi-Gicugu Euphemism.**

Ms. Maguh has defended at the Faculty level and is now expected to conduct research. Any assistance accorded will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,


Prof. Moses Muraya, Ph.D.
**DIRECTOR
BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

Appendix 6: Ethics Review Committee Authorization



CHUKA UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Telephones: 020-2310512/18

Direct Line: 0772894438

Email: info@chuka.ac.ke,

P. O. Box 109-60400, Chuka

Website: www.chuka.ac.ke

18th June, 2025

REF: CUIERC/ NACOSTI/786

TO: Miriam Wangui Maguh

RE: A Lexico-Pragmatic Interpretation of Gi-Gicugu Euphemism

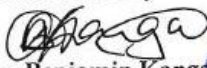
This is to inform you that *Chuka University IERC* has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is *NACOSTI/NBC/AC-0812*. The approval period is 18th June, 2025 – 18th June, 2026.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by *Chuka University IERC*.
- iii. Death and life threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to *Chuka University IERC* within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *Chuka University IERC* within 72 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to *Chuka University IERC*.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://oris.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely


Dr. Benjamin Kanga
SECRETARY



Appendix 7: National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) License

 REPUBLIC OF KENYA NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION Ref No: 623591	RESEARCH LICENSE  This is to Certify that Ms., MIRIAM WANGUI MAGUH of Chuka University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Kirinyaga on the topic: A LEXICO-PRAGMATIC INTERPRETATION OF GI-GICUGU EUPHEMISM for the period ending : 03/July/2026. License No: NACOSTI/P/25/4176067 623591 Applicant Identification Number Ag. Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION Verification QR Code  NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application. See overleaf for conditions
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