

**The Role of Address Terms in  
Expressing Politeness in  
Social Interaction in Sukuma**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examined the role of address terms in expressing politeness in social interaction in Sukuma, a language spoken in the North Western Tanzania. In the course of investigation, a total of fourteen conversations were recorded, and seven cases were observed. Data were transcribed and analysed through the Thematic Coding Approach. The findings revealed that address terms play a significant role in expressing politeness in social interaction in Sukuma. Specifically, both positive and negative politeness strategies were revealed through the use of address terms. Positive politeness strategies were revealed through the use of terms of endearment like love, dear, homey, and friend while negative politeness strategies were revealed through the use of honorifics like father, mother, father-in-law, mother-in-law, and village head. The study recommends studies on individual languages on address terms in particular and politeness in general in order to come up with plausible generalisation.*

**Keywords:** *Address terms, face threatening acts, politeness, social interaction, Sukuma*

**Introduction**

Linguistic politeness has been a major concern in recent years following Brown and Levinson's publication in 1978/1987. One of the important areas in which linguistic politeness can be realised is through address terms. Address terms usage has attracted research interest worldwide. Mashiri (2004: 63 cited in Kufakunesu, 2012:85) notes that "address and reference systems are a universal phenomenon." This means that every culture has its own way of using terms of address to meet its purpose. Consequently, studies on address terms have shown that there is a direct link between politeness and address terms such that it is difficult to talk about

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linguistic politeness while paying little or no attention to address terms. As Afful (2006b) notes:

Participating in conversations, people consciously or unconsciously show their identities, their belonging to a specific culture or group and their tendencies to become close or distant from others. A significant linguistic area in which all these functions are highlighted is terms of address (Afful, 2006b cited in Moghaddam, 2013:57).

Address terms are words or expressions used in interactive face-to-face situations to characterise the person being talked about. They are linguistic expressions that are used in addressing others to attract their attention or make reference about them. Generally, by appropriate use of address terms, people identify themselves as part of a social group while inappropriate choice of address ceases good interaction. Magashi (2017) also notes that appropriate address terms create a conducive atmosphere that facilitates harmonious interaction while inappropriate address terms may lead to conflicts and breakdown of communication. Thus, the idea of appropriateness to context is central to any study of linguistic politeness (Araújo Carreira, 2005). Based on the fact that terms of address are a common phenomenon across cultures, and that they are significant in creating a harmonious interaction, this study was deemed important in order to uncover the address terms that are used to mitigate FTAs in Sukuma.

### **Literature Review**

Gu (1990:247) proposes the maxim of address among Chinese interlocutors: “address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term”. Gu maintains that “to address one’s interlocutor in Chinese is not a matter of uttering some sounds to draw the interlocutor’s attention, but it involves speaker’s recognition of the hearer as a social being in his specific status or role, and speaker’s definition of social relation between the speaker and hearer” (*ibid.* 248).

This perspective is also supported by Holmes (1992:268) who contends that “the choice of address terms can be a sign of politeness since it is closely dependent on the interactants’ relationship or social distance”. Thus, appropriate use of address terms is used to maintain social bonds, strengthen solidarity, and control social distance. On the contrary, failure to use an appropriate address term is a sign of rudeness or breakdown of established social order. Katakami (1997) studied personal names and address terms among the Mbeere, a Bantu language spoken in Kenya. The findings revealed that Mbeere address terms, personal names, naming customs, and modes of address reflect respect for different generations. This means that a person is addressed in many ways depending on whether he or she is of the same generation-set with that of the speaker. The relationship between the adjacent generation-sets requires greater respect, and the relations between the in-laws require extreme respect. The forms of address for the daughter-in-law are the most elaborate and formal in comparison to other names, reflecting the marriage rules of the clan.

Kufakunesu et al. (2012) examined terms of address usage by police officers at Mbare police station in Harare. The findings revealed that kinship terms, occupational titles, and personal pronouns were predominantly used by the police as address terms in conversation with people who visited Mbare police station to report crimes. According to them, “kinship terms are honorifically used to connotatively maintain and enrich social interaction among both related and unrelated participants” (Kufakunesu et al., 2012:87). This implies that, in the literal sense, kin terms are used to show relationships between people who belong to the same family or genealogy, but from a metaphorical perspective, the same terms can be used to refer to strangers to show respect.

Moghaddam et al. (2013) also examined Persian address terms within the theory of politeness in the three distinct historical periods of Qajar (1791-1925), Pahlavi (1926-1979) and after the Islamic Revolution (1979-to the time the study was conducted). The findings revealed that there are ten address terms used in

Persian. These include personal names, usually first name and last names, general titles such as Mr, Mrs, and Miss; occupation titles such as Dr. and engineer; kinship related terms; religious oriented expressions; honorifics; terms of intimacy; personal pronouns; teknonyms; and zero-address terms. They further argue that the choice of address terms is a sign of politeness since it is closely dependent on the interactants' relationship or social distance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Brown and Levinson's Theory of Linguistic Politeness (1987) based on the notion of face from Goffman (1967). Goffman (1967:3) asserts that "face is a positive social value a person effectively claims by the line others assume s/he has taken during a particular contact." Goffman maintains that regardless of whether a person intends to take a line or not, s/he will find that s/he has done so in effect. Based on these ideas, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that face is something emotionally invested and that it can be lost maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction. They further argue that speech acts that adversely affect the hearer's and/or speaker's negative or positive face, henceforth Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), comprise any kind of linguistic action that involves the interlocutors' relationship. Therefore, acts like requests, complaints, disagreements, reminders, apologies, refusals and orders are FTAs as they tend to threaten speakers' or hearers' negative or positive face. Thus, they developed a framework of politeness strategies that can be used to formulate messages to save the hearer's or speaker's face when FTAs are inevitable or desirable. Brown and Levinson developed four politeness strategies including bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness and off record. They further stipulated that each set of strategies has some specific set of circumstances and purposes in which they are used. Thus, the choice of a strategy is based on the speaker's assessment of the size of the FTA, and the speaker calculates the size of the FTA on the

basis of parameters of power (P), distance (D), and the rate of imposition (R). These combined values determine the weightiness of the FTA, which in turn, influences the choice of a strategy. In this study, this theory was used to identify address terms that were mainly used as strategies to redress FTAs.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study was carried out in Kwimba District in Mwanza region, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative approach where ethnography design was used. The researcher stayed in the field for one year participating in different activities and observing and recording talks in interaction. A total of fourteen conversations were recorded and 20 cases were observed. Data from observations and recorded conversations were transcribed and analysed using the Thematic Coding Approach.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that there are thirteen address terms that are commonly used in social interaction in Sukuma. These include *bha:bha* ‘father’ versus *ma:yu* ‘mother’, *bha:bha bhoko* ‘father-in-law’ versus *ma:yu bhoko* ‘mother-in-law’, *namhala* ‘old man’ or ‘elder’ or ‘head of the family’ versus *ngi:kolo* ‘old woman’ or ‘female head’ or ‘friend’, *ng’wanangwa* ‘village head’, *nga:lo* versus *ngi:ka* ‘friend’, *ma:ma* ‘grandmother or friend’ versus *gu:ku* ‘grandfather’ or ‘friend’, *ndugv wane/one* ‘my relative’, *ng’wa:na ong’wi:se* usually abbreviated as *ong’wi:se* ‘homey’ or ‘friend’ or ‘my companion’, *ngo:sha* ‘man’ or ‘friend’ versus *nki:ma* ‘woman’, *nko:yi* ‘darling’ or ‘love’ or ‘dear’ or ‘friend’, *ng’wana...* ‘son of...or daughter of...’, first or given names, and the second person singular pronoun *bhe:bhe* ‘you’. However, due to its complexity, the second person singular pronoun will be addressed in a different paper.

### **Bha:bha ‘Father’ versus Ma:yu ‘Mother’**

Technically, the word *bha:bha* ‘father’ refers to a male parent. When this term carries this meaning, it is usually used in both

direct address and indirect address. This is what Brown and Levinson (1987) call addressee and referent honorifics, respectively. With this sense, *bha:bha* ‘father’ is non-reciprocal, and the addressee can choose any reaction from the available reactions that range from polite to impolite ones. For example, the biological or social father can react with a wish for long life by saying *lama* ‘live long’ or by asking a question *ginehe?* ‘what?’ This question demands the son or daughter to tell the father what he/she wants to tell him. However, the term *bha:bha* ‘father’ is also used in a direct address to politely refer to all males regardless of their ages or ethnicities. For example, if a native speaker of Sukuma meets a male stranger, the appropriate address term to be used is *bha:bha* ‘father’. In this context, the addressee is not free to respond the way he wishes, but he has to respond by addressing him or her as *bha:bha* ‘father’ or *ma:yv* ‘mother’, respectively. When this aspect is not taken into consideration during interaction, problems may arise, and communication may break down. The extract below illustrates this argument:

(1) 1 A: *dvliho bha:bha*,  
           ‘You are welcome, father.’

2 B: *mlho bha:bha*

          ‘You are present, father’ similar to ‘Thank you, father.’

In Extract (1) above, A is an old man in his 90s who addressed B, a young man in his 30s as *bha:bha* ‘father’ despite the fact that B was younger than A. In turn, B in line 2 also addressed A as *bha:bha* ‘father’ as a repay for the respect accorded. Therefore, the address term *bha:bha* ‘father’ is not only an address term for a male parent, but also a strategy for showing respect in Sukuma. When it is used for this purpose, it is reciprocal regardless of age or ethnicity. Exceptions, however, exist for close relatives and young men who are well known to the speaker. These are usually addressed by using their first names or other appropriate forms of address.

Similarly, the term *ma:yv* ‘mother’ refers to a female parent. When this term is used with this meaning, it is not reciprocal and the addressee has a wide range of responses to select.

These range from very formal like *lama* ‘live long’ to very informal ones like *ginehe* ‘what?’ This demands the interlocutor to say what she or he wants to say. Moreover, the findings have shown that the term *ma:yu* ‘mother’ is used in a direct address to refer to all female interlocutors regardless of their ages or ethnicities. This usage is usually reciprocal although it has some exceptions for close relatives like sisters and young interlocutors who are well known to the speaker. These are usually addressed using their first names. When *ma:yu* ‘mother’ is used with this meaning, the addressee is not free to react the way she wishes as it is with the biological mother, but she is indebted to repay for the respect accorded by responding appropriately. Appropriateness, in this sense, means responding by addressing him/her as ‘father’ or ‘mother, respectively. If this expected reciprocity misses, problems may arise in interaction. The extract below is illustrative:

- (2) 1 B: ma:yu,  
          ‘Mother’  
      2 C: bha:bha,  
          ‘Father’  
      3B: niyo ma:yu lolu nalibhona gi:k’o:namhala  
          ng’wenoyu, gemagi uguchagata.unamhala  
          ng’wenoyu almadomihayo dowingi  
      ‘Now, mother, I think you try to talk to this  
          old man: he has a lot of words (to help you)’

In Extract (2) above, B, a man in his 30s, addressed C, a woman in her 50s as *ma:yu*, ‘mother.’ C, in line 2 also addressed B as *bha:bha* ‘father’ to repay for the respect accorded, and the conversation continued. This mutual respect helps to keep communication moving. Additionally, the terms *bha:bha* ‘father’ and *ma:yu* ‘mother’ are used by sons/daughters-in-law when addressing their fathers/ mothers-in-law, respectively. With this usage, these terms are reciprocal regardless of the age of the son or daughter-in-law.

Similarly, in Extract (3) below, A addressed his fellow porter as *bha:bha* ‘father’ when he said: *duja:ge bha:bha* ‘let’s go, father’

in an attempt to show respect and to redress the threat inherent in the order, *doja:ge* 'let's go'. As a return to the respect, B in line 2 also addressed A as *bha:bha* 'father'. The following extract exemplifies this argument:

- (3) 1 A: *doja:ge bha:bha*,  
       'Let's go, father'  
       2 B: *doja:ge bha:bha*.  
       'Let's go, father'

From the data above, one may generally conclude that the address terms *bha:bha* 'father' and *ma:yɔ* 'mother' are used with two different meanings. The first is the denotative meaning. With this meaning, the address terms *bha:bha* 'father' and *ma:yɔ* 'mother' are used to politely refer to either biological or social male and female parents of the speaker respectively. When they are used in this context, they are non-reciprocal and the addressee is free to react the way she or he wishes. The second meaning is the connotative meaning. With this usage, the terms *bha:bha* 'father' and *ma:yɔ* 'mother' is used to refer to all male and female interlocutors, respectively, to show respect. These findings are similar to the findings by Kufakunesu et al. (2012) which revealed that kinship terms like *baba* 'father' are honorifically used to maintain and enrich social interaction among both related and unrelated participants. However, there is a difference in the way these kinship terms are extended to non-family members between Sukuma and Shona. In Sukuma, age does not count when one addresses a female or male interlocutor with whom the speaker is not genealogically related. Exception exists for addressees who are well known to the speaker. These are usually addressed using their first names. In the Shona cultural perspective, they argue that whenever one wants to address someone who looks like one's father in terms of age, one normally chooses the term *baba* 'father' to show respect.

### Bha:bha bhoko 'Father-in-law' versus Ma:yu bhoko 'Mother-in-law'

The terms *bha:bha bhoko* 'father-in-law' and *ma:yu bhoko* 'mother-in-law' literally mean one's spouse's male and female parent, respectively. When these terms carry this meaning, they are not usually used in a direct address, but they are used in an indirect address to refer to them in their absence. When they are used in a direct address, they usually show the highest level of respect or avoidance strategy. In Sukuma, one's in-laws are more respected than one's own parents. For example, it is a taboo for a man to mention the first name of his mother-in-law as it is also a taboo for a woman to mention the first name of her father-in-law. For that case, if it happens that one's daughter is given the first name of his mother-in-law, then the father has to avoid to mention the name of his daughter at any cost. One of the options is to address her daughter as *ma:yu bhoko* 'mother-in-law'. Addressing his daughter by her first name is socially considered disrespectful. Similarly, when a woman has a son who bears the name of her father-in-law, the woman has to avoid mentioning the name of her son by addressing him *bha:bha bhoko* 'father-in-law' or other appropriate address terms.

However, the terms *bha:bha bhoko* 'father-in-law' and *ma:yu bhoko* 'mother-in-law' can be extended to non-family members provided that the speaker wishes to express respect towards the addressee, and this is usually regardless of age or ethnicity. The extract below illustrates this argument:

(4) 1 B: *ihaha lolv ma:yu, ngkolv one, ahang'wa  
tisiani nang'ho vlnakanimo ki ho, ma:yu  
bhoko?*

'But, what work do you do at Tisian's house,  
mother, my friend, my mother-in-law?'

2 A: *abhi:se ma:yu omhayo gwenoyv hvgodenhile,  
'This work is what brought us here, mother.'*

In Extract (4) above, B, an old woman in her 60s addressed A, a woman in her 40s as *ma:yu* 'mother', *ngi:kolv one* 'my friend'

and *ma:yv bhoko* ‘mother-in-law’ in an attempt to elevate her in the process of presenting her request. In turn, A, in line 2 also addressed B as ‘mother’ to repay for the respect accorded. If, for example, A could just respond to B without the address term *ma:yv* ‘mother’, it could be interpreted as being rude or disrespectful. Thus, it can be concluded that the address terms *bha:bha bhoko* ‘father-in-law’ and *ma:yv bhoko* ‘mother-in-law’ are used both in direct or indirect address in Sukuma. When these terms are used in an indirect address, they usually retain their basic meanings, and they are usually non reciprocal. However, when these terms are used in a direct address, they usually adopt the connotative meaning, and they are usually reciprocal. These findings concur with the findings by Katakami (1997) who examined names and address terms among the Mbeere. The findings of her study revealed that among the Mbeere, it is a taboo for the daughter-in-law to mention the first name of her father-in-law. Similarly, it is also a taboo for the son-in-law to mention the first name of his mother-in-law. Katakami argues that the avoidance between the daughter and father-in-law in Mbeere complicates the forms of address because a daughter-in-law can neither address her father-in-law by his personal name nor by his *njau* ‘animal’ name. As a result, if a woman has a son named by the name of her father-in-law; and a man has a daughter named by the name of his mother-in-law, then the woman calls the boy *Mugendi* ‘traveller’ and the man calls the girl *Kaari* ‘a small girl’ in an attempt to avoid mentioning the name of her father or his mother-in-law, respectively.

### **Namhala ‘Old Man’, ‘Elder’ or ‘Head of the Family’ versus Ngi:kolo ‘Old Woman’, ‘Elder’, ‘Female Head’ or ‘Friend’**

On the one hand, the term *namhala* technically means ‘old man’. In social interaction, however, this term carries three meanings. The first meaning of the term *namhala* is the basic meaning ‘old man’ which is used in an indirect address to refer to an old man in his absence or in his presence, but when he is not the addressee. The extract below serves as an example:

- (5) 1 B: *ma:yv*  
 ‘Mother’  
 2 C: *bha:bha*,  
 ‘Father’  
 3 B: *niyoma:yv lɔlɔ nalbhona gr:k’o:namhala*  
*ng’wenyɔgemag’yv:guchagata vnamhala*  
*ng’wenyɔv a li-nadɔ mihayo dowingi*  
 ‘Now, mother, I think that this old man...try to  
 talk to this old man: he has a lot of  
 words.’

In Extract (5) above, B, in line 3, was making reference to an old man who was not the addressee in the conversation.

Similarly, in Extract (6) below, B was making reference to an old man who was not around during the conversation.

- (6) B: *kagoshika aka-namhala duhu mgwiyelelwa*.  
 ‘The old man will just arrive; you will  
 understand one another’  
 2 A: *angv*,  
 ‘Is it?’

In Extract (6), B was making reference to an old man in his 90s who was not there at that time, and B was encouraging A to wait for him. In this context, the address term *namhala* ‘old man’ carries its basic meaning, and it is not reciprocal.

The second meaning of the term *namhala* is ‘elder man’. When this term carries this meaning, it is usually used in a direct address to elevate the addressee. With this usage, the term *namhala* ‘elder man’ is reciprocal such that one is expected to repay back the respect by addressing the speaker as *namhala* ‘elder man’ or *bha:bha* ‘father’. When this reciprocity lacks, problems may arise in interaction. The extract below serves as an example:

- (7) 1 C2: *niyo nadegeleke ge:te, tolaga kamo*  
*namhala; bha:bha kaji:laga kamo!*  
 ‘Oh, let me listen carefully; bring one more, elder-  
 man, father, bring one more, please.’  
 2 C5: *cho:: bhe:bhe, niyo natv:le nadegeleke ge:te*.  
 ‘Hey, you, let me put down and listen carefully.’

3 C2: *ji:laga kamo namhala; ji:laga kamo.*

‘Bring one more, elder man; bring one more.’

From Extract (7), C2, a member of the choir, was addressing the songster (does not appear in the extract) as *namhala* ‘elder man’ in line 1 and 3 in an attempt to request him to add one more song before they left. Thus, one can argue that the address term *namhala* ‘elder man’ was used as a strategy for redressing the request since the songster was younger than C2. This kind of usage is usually reciprocal. However, the return in this context was not explicitly made (in form of an address term), but implicitly by accepting the request.

In a participant observation, it was also revealed that the term *namhala* ‘elder man’ is reciprocal when used in a direct address, and it is usually used by people with similar status and age mates. The following is an exchange that was observed between a man in his 30s and another man in his 40s.

- (8)
- 1 A: *Namhala,*  
‘Elder man,’
- 2 B: *Namhala,*  
‘Elder man,’
- 3 A: *Ginehe nko:yi?*  
‘How are you, dear?’
- 4 B: *Mhola dvhv*  
‘Just fine.’

In Extract (8), A, addressed B as *namhala* elder man, and B had to repay by addressing A as *namhala* ‘elder man’. In line 3, A, changed the address term from *namhala* ‘elder man’ to *nko:yi* ‘dear,’ which is also accepted by B, without repaying for the friendship. This suggests that mutual respect is more valued than mutual friendliness in Sukuma.

The third usage is also related to connotative meaning where all heads of families, regardless of their ages, can be referred to as *namhala* ‘head of the family’. This usage is also restricted to indirect address. The extract below serves as an example:

(9) 1B: *donsangv·namhala oho ati:ho, urta lolv gr:ki, aganamhalagaliho ahene, lakini kadulile guyomba na monhv sana v:yo kagahoyaga nag'hwe v:ng'witonja·abhangr ulv gr:ki ugabhologutla, ndohv nvguguyombya.*

'We did not find the head of the family. Someone told us that the old man was present, but he usually speaks to only one person, his son. If other people are not careful, the old man doesn't even speak.'

2A: *aganamhala ki?*

Which old man?

3B: *aganamhala agagachwele*

'The old man, Gachwele.'

From Extract (9), the address term *namhala* is mentioned four times. In line 1, the term *namhala* 'old man' is mentioned twice, but in two different contexts. The first context was revealed when B said: *donsangv·namhala oho ati:ho*: 'we did not find the head of the family.' From this statement, one can argue that B refers to the head of family as *namhala* in an indirect address. In the same line, B uses the address term *namhala* with its technical sense to refer the old man who was present during the visit, but they could not talk to him because it was reported that the old man talks only to his son (the head of the family) who was absent during the visit. In line 3 and 4, however, the term *namhala* was used with its technical sense 'old man.'

On the other hand, the term *ngi:kolv* 'old woman' has two meanings: the basic meaning 'old woman' and the connotative meaning. The connotative sense of the term *ngi:kolv* carries three meanings: 'elder woman', 'female head of the family' and 'friend' depending on the context. In the extract below, the term *ngi:kolv* was used with its basic meaning to refer to an old woman.

(10) 1 B: *v:yo lolwa·ndyag' v:guyomba nang'hwe: abhashisukuma sha kale.*

Here she is; you may begin talking to her; people with ancient

Sukuma.’

2 A: *HHHH, ungi:kulv,*

‘HHHH, the old woman,’

In Extract (10), B, a woman in his 50s, was introducing A to talk to an old woman in his 80s. A, as a sign of agreement, mentioned the referent: *ungi:kulv* ‘the old woman’. Likewise, in Extract (11), the term *ngi:kulv* was used with its basic meaning.

(11) 1 B: *sangagi ng’wohoy:a n’ungi:kulv ng’wewo:yu.*

‘Go on talking to this old woman.’

2 A: *e::, ungi:kulv; kinang’we:ge:le.*

‘Ok, the old woman; let me draw close to her.’

From Extract (11), B, in line 1 was encouraging A to talk to the old woman while waiting for the old man, who was the focus of the visit. In an attempt to agree with B’s opinion, A, apart from explicitly accepting, she also repeated the address term *ungi:kulv* ‘the old woman’.

In Extract (12), however, the term *ngi:kulv* was used in a direct address to mean ‘friend.’

(12) 1 B: *ihaha kulv ma:yu, ngi:kulv one, ahang’watisiani nang’ho ulnak-nimo kicho, ma:yu bhoko?*

‘Now, mother, my friend, what are you doing at Tisiani’s house, mother-in-law?’

2 A: *abhi:se ma:yv:mhayo gwewuyu hvgodenhile,*

‘This work is what brought us here, mother.’

In Extract (12), B, a woman in her 60s, addressed A, a woman in her 40s, as *ma:yu*, *ngi:kulv one*, ‘mother’ and ‘my friend’. In this context, the address term *ngi:kulv one* connotatively means ‘my friend’. This was used as a strategy to reduce the social distance between them so that B could present her request. In turn, A also addressed B as *ma:yu*, ‘mother’, but dropped out *ngi:kulv one* ‘my friend’ and the conversation continued smoothly. This shows that mutual respect is more valued than mutual friendship. These findings are similar to the findings by Kufakunesu et al. (2012) which revealed that the police usually addressed clients who came to report cases as ‘old man’ depending on their ages, which is typical of Shona

cultural orientation. However, a difference exists between Sukuma and Shona because among the Sukuma, the address terms *namhala* ‘old man’ and *ngi:kulo* ‘old woman’ are connotatively used to show respect and friendliness usually regardless of age.

### **Ng’wanangwa ‘Village Head’**

The term *ng’wanangwa* technically means ‘village head.’ This term was used in pre independence Sukuma society following the administrative structure. After independence, such an administrative structure was abandoned, but the address term remained. Thus, this term lost its technical meaning in social interaction, and the indirect use of the term disappeared.

The direct use of this word connotatively shows respect, usually between interlocutors of equal status. This usage is reciprocal, and it is used as a strategy to redress FTAs in Sukuma. The extract below exemplifies this argument:

(13) 1 A: *dohlomba shi kolw’a:bh-i:se; ng’wanangwa!*

‘We are requesting, please, village head.’

(.)

2 B: *yani gi:ki, mgulocha doh’a:heneha, ndohv nolwi:gana.*

‘You will end up wasting your whole day here. I do not have even one hundred shillings.’

3 A: *na-mv:ja ge:te niyo gi:ki kinehe, ng’w-anangwa, di:che?=-*

‘I really asked him, village head, should we unload?’

4 A: *=nol gwandya gwi:bha dohv,*

‘You may just begin stealing!’

Extract (13) is part of a conversation between A, a porter and B, a shopkeeper. A was requesting for the payment from B, but B refused to pay the money. A, in line 1, used the term *ng’wanangwa* ‘village head’ to show respect and elevate B so that he could accept to pay the money. However, in line 2, B did not only reject the request, but he made it in a way that seemed to offend the porter when he said: *yani gi:ki, mgulocha doh’a:heneha, ndohv nolwi:gana* ‘You will just end up wasting your whole day here. I do not have even one hundred shillings.’ As a result, the porter complained that he asked the shopkeeper on whether they should unload the cargo or not. In

expressing the complaint, A, in line 3 also used the term *ng'wanangwa* 'village head' to refer to the shopkeeper.

From the above discussion, one may argue that the term *ng'wanangwa* 'village head' is an address term that is used in a direct address as a strategy to redress FTAs. The problem that can be seen here is the shopkeeper's failure to adhere to politeness rules which can be interpreted as being rude. Following the shopkeeper's response, the porter decided to leave, but he was discontented when he said: *nolw gwandya gwi:bha dolw* 'You may just begin stealing'.

This address term was also noted in observation. The following short extract is part of an exchange between two men, A, in his 40s and B in his 70s.

- (14) 1 A: *Ng'w-anangwa*,  
       'Village head'  
       2 B: *Ng'w-anangwa*,  
       'Village head'  
       3 A: *Uliho?*  
       'Are you present?'  
       B: *Naliho nko:yi*  
       'I am present, dear.'

In Extract (14), A, initiated the conversation by addressing B as *ng'wanangwa* 'village head'. In turn, B also addressed A as *ng'wanangwa* 'village head' as a repay for the respect accorded. This shows that in Sukuma, mutual respect is more valued than mutual friendship. These findings are similar to the findings by Gu (1990), in relation to Chinese, who maintains that the self-denigration maxim is very important in maintaining harmonious interaction. In Chinese, the self-denigration maxim has two sub maxims. The first sub maxim reads: denigrate 'self' while the second reads: elevate 'other.' In this culture, the breach of the first sub maxim by denigrating 'other' is perceived as being impolite or rude while the breach of the second sub maxim by elevating oneself is considered as being arrogant, boasting or self-conceited.

### **Nga:lo versus Ngi:ka ‘Friend’**

The terms *nga:lo* and *ngi:ka* have no technical meanings in Sukuma, but they were traditionally used to connotatively refer to ‘notorious’ and ‘noble’ persons, respectively. Recently, however, these terms are used to mean ‘friend’ regardless of the etymology. The extract below illustrates this argument:

(15) 1 C: *hene ang’u:logiki:lho mbola oja gwishamba, alhaha*

If it were raining, you just go to farm, but now...’

2 A: *iki ngayombaga mawenge dhu; ngayombagashi*

*yaki:mihayo ye:ni:yo!*

You just speak politics; why do you speak such words, please?’

3 B: *k’u:dahmile shi nga:lo!*

‘You did not dig, please, friend.’

From Extract (15), C, a young man in his 20s, initiated the topic in line 1 when he said that he could go to the farm if it were raining. However, A, in line 2 disagreed with C by asserting that C could not do farming alongside his occupation as a bus conductor. B, in line 3, also emphasised A’s opinion that C cannot do digging alongside his work. In doing so, B used the address term *nga:lo* ‘friend’ to redress the threat that is inherent in disagreement.

This address term was also revealed in an observation that was conducted in Bungulwa village between three young boys around 7. The extract below serves as an example:

(16) 1 A: *Dojagi bhaga:lo*

Let’s go, friends.

2 B: *Dojagi*

Let’s go.

3 A, B, C: ((stood up and left the place))

In the above short conversation, one of the boys told his friends: *dojagi bhaga:lo* ‘let’s go friends’ in order to make his friends feel good, and minimise the imposition inherent in the order *dojagi* ‘let’s go’.

Similarly, the conversation below was taken from an exchange between a shopkeeper and his client in Hungumalwa ward. A is a client while B is a shopkeeper.

- (17) 1 A: *Ngi:ka*  
       ‘ Friend’  
       2 B: *Ngi:ka*  
       ‘Friend’  
       3 A: *Nambilage shi soda*  
       ‘Assist me with a Soda, please’  
       4 B: ((took the money and gave the Soda to A))

From Extract (17), A, a client, was requesting for a *Soda* ‘a sweet soft drink’, from B, the shopkeeper. In doing so, A, in line 1, addressed the shopkeeper as *ngi:ka* ‘friend’. To respond to his client, B in line 2 also addressed A as *ngi:ka* ‘friend’. Therefore, one can argue that the address terms *nga:lv* and *ngi:ka* are used connotatively to mean ‘friend’ in social interaction as strategies to redress FTAs. In this sense, they are usually reciprocal although lack of reciprocity is less threatening as with honorifics such as *namhala* ‘elder man’, *bha:bha* ‘father’, *ma:yv* ‘mother’, *bha:bha bhvko* ‘father-in-law’ and *ma:yv bhvko* ‘mother-in-law’. This implies that mutual respect is more valued in Sukuma than mutual friendship. However, the term *nga:lv* seems to be more common compared to *ngi:ka*. These findings are similar to the findings by Brown and Levinson (1987) who argue that terms of endearment like dear, love, and friend are used as strategies for redressing FTAs.

### **Ma:ma ‘Grandmother’ or ‘Friend’ versus Go:ko ‘Grandfather’ or ‘Friend’**

Technically, the word *ma:ma* means ‘grandmother’ while *gv:kv* means ‘grandfather’. Thus, when a grand-daughter/son addresses her/his grandfather, the term *gv:kv* carries its technical meaning ‘grandfather’. Similarly, when a grand-daughter/son addresses her/his grandmother, the term *ma:ma* ‘grandmother’ also carries its technical meaning. However, in a direct address, the terms *gv:kv* and *ma:ma* are used to mean ‘friend’. In this sense, they are used to express politeness by minimising the impact of the FTAs. The extract below illustrates this argument:

- (18) 1 F: *ngehv, kajaga shi wangu ma:ma!*  
‘Ngehv, hurry up please, friend!’  
2 I: *angv nashija lih dohv*  
‘But, I have remained with this one only’  
3 D: *e:!*  
‘Ok!’  
4 F: *kajaga ng’wanone msombe shi nabhing’we ng’woqe!* ‘Hurry up, my child; go and fetch (water) so that you can also take shower, please.’

Extract (18) is part of a conversation between F, I, and D. F is I’s step mother who was telling her step daughter to finish up what she was doing so that she could go to fetch water. In doing so, F addressed I as *ma:ma* ‘friend’ in order to redress the threat that was inherent in the order. In line 4, F disclosed her relationship with I that it was a mother-child relationship when she addressed her as *ng’wan’o:ne* ‘my child’.

In the same manner, the word *gv:kv* is used in the extract below to mean ‘friend’.

- (19) 1 A: ... *ila...angv sawa nidi:cha, angv didobhvoja g:ki, gv:kv ginehe doli:cha. nokwe:nv:ko tobshika tobhvoja,ung’wenekel’v:kolema, wicha dohv.*

‘But ... ok, we could just unload, but we asked you, friend, should we unload? Even where we come from, we were asking the same. If the owner did not accept, then, she/he unloaded him/herself.’

- 2 B: *aha!*  
‘Ok!’

Extract (19) is part of a conversation between A, a porter and B, a shopkeeper. A was requesting for payment from B after unloading B’s cargo from a lorry. In so doing, A addressed B as *gv:kv* which connotatively means ‘friend.’

Therefore, one may conclude that the address terms *gv:kv* ‘grandfather’ and *ma:ma* ‘grandmother’ have two different meanings when used in social interaction. The first meaning correlates to the denotative sense ‘grandfather’ and

‘grandmother’, respectively while the second meaning correlates to the connotative meaning ‘friend’. These findings are similar to the findings by Brown and Levinson (1987) who argue that address terms such as dear, love, and friend are used to create an in-group identity between the speaker and the addressee so that one feels good before an FTA is presented.

### **Ndogo wane/one ‘My Relative’**

*Ndogo wane/one* ‘my relative’ is another address term that is used to create an in-group identity between interlocutors among Sukuma. The findings revealed that *ndogvo wane/one* ‘my relative’ can both be used in a direct as well as in indirect address. In the indirect address, *ndogvo wane* ‘my relative’ is used to refer to a blood relative, whether close or distant. In a direct address, however, this term is used as a strategy for redressing FTAs between unrelated interlocutors. The following extract serves as an example to support this argument:

- (20) 1 B: *hama lkv ndogvo wane ka nane nagananzagola,*  
           ‘But now, my relative, please, I am a hooligan,’  
       2 A: *ehema:yv,*  
           ‘Yes, mother’

In Extract (20), B in line 1 wanted to request for some money from A, and in the process of making her request, she addressed A as *ndogvo wane* ‘my relative’ while they were meeting for the first time. In this sense, the address term *ndogvo wane* ‘my relative’ was used as a strategy for redressing a FTA.

In a participant observation, the address term *ndogvo wane* ‘my relative’ was also revealed to be a strategy for redressing FTAs. The extract below was observed in Lyoma ward when one usher wanted to take chairs from the guests who attended an event when the then CCM Secretary General, Mr. Abdulrahman Kinana, visited the place. The usher said: *nang’wibhonele lkv bhadogvo bhane natoshoshe utusumbi* ‘let me treat you unjustly, my relatives, so that I return the chairs.’ In this context, the usher was requesting the guests to

vacate the chairs so that she could return them to the office. However, the guests were still sitting and watching for some choirs that were entertaining the audience. Therefore, the request to take the chairs was threatening because it could mean that they should either watch while standing or else they should leave. To present the request, the usher used different strategies including the address term *bhadogv bhane* ‘my relatives’ in order to minimise the amount of imposition. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this is an in-group identity marker that serves to lessen the impact of a face threatening act when it is inevitable.

### **Nko:yi ‘Darling’, ‘Love’, ‘Dear’ or Friend**

*The term nko:yi* basically means ‘darling’ or ‘love’. In the past few decades, this term was a taboo in Sukuma, and it could not be mentioned in public. Thus, it was reserved for lovers only. Nowadays, the meaning of this word has been extended to mean ‘dear’ or ‘friend,’ and it is usually used in public and often regardless of the sex of the addressee. The extract below is illustrative:

- (21) 1 B: *nen'a:hene bhako:yi kang'wonambilija*  
*dhv, bhana bhang'wi:se,*  
But, dears, you just assist me please,  
homies.'  
2 A: *m::*  
‘Yes!’  
3 B: *nene nagadobv:taga dhv togomala mawazo*  
‘I just drink a little for refreshment.’  
3 A: HHHH; HHHH

From Extract (21), B, a woman in her 50s, in line 1 addressed A, a woman in her 40s and another participant who is not mentioned in the extract as *bhako:yi* ‘dears’ or ‘friends’ in an attempt to present her request. In line 3, B disclosed that she was requesting for some money to buy local liquor.

Similarly, in Extract (22), the word *nko:yi* ‘love’ was used by a female friend to address a male friend.

- (22) 1 F: *ndhv, bha:tomamile bhanhv bhangr.*  
‘No, it is some other people’s work.’

2 B: *gashi; ugujaga h'v:bhe:bhe?*

'Ok! Where do you go nowadays?'

3 F: *m, unene nko:yi ka maguyela d'hw*

'Not really! I am just roaming around,  
dear, please.'

Extract (22) is part of an exchange between B and F which was recorded in Ngudu ward at a food vendor's place. On the day the conversation was taken, F, a man in his 40s, was unloading a lorry full of rice sacks. Thus, B, a woman in her 40s, was interested to know whether F was continuing with the business he used to do. In line 1, F replied that the cargo he was unloading was not his, but some peoples' work. B, in line 2 agreed with F, but she wanted to know where F was going (for business). F in line 3, denied doing business, but he said he was just roaming around. In the process of redressing disagreement with B, F in line 3 addressed B as *nko:yi* 'love'. For that case, the word *nko:yi* 'love' was used to redress a threat inherent in disagreement. Therefore, I argue that the word *nko:yi* 'darling' or 'love' has a generalised meaning to include 'dear' and 'friend' which are basically public words. These findings concur with the findings by Holmes (1992) who argues that the term 'love,' in North England, has a generalised meaning such that even bus conductors and food vendors call their clients, 'love'.

### Ng'wana Ong'wi:se or Ong'wi:se 'Homey', 'Friend' or 'My Companion'

The term *ng'wana ong'wi:se*, usually abbreviated as *ong'wi:se* technically means 'homey.' In social interaction, however, this term is usually used in a direct address to mean 'friend'. With this usage, it is usually used as a strategy to mitigate face threatening acts in interaction. The extract below illustrates this argument:

(23) 1 B: *luselele,*

'Luselele,'

2 F: *(lama)*

'Live long!'

3 B: *kineh'o:ng'wi:se?*

'How are you, homey?'

4 F: *mhola sana bwana.*

'Quite ok, master.'

From Extract (23), B in line 1 drew F's attention by addressing him using his first name, *Luselele*. F, in line 2 politely reacted *lama* 'live long' to show that he was addressed with an appropriate address term. In line 3, B went on inquiring about F's wellbeing and addressed him *ong'wi:se* which roughly means the 'child of my home or homey.'

However, given the fact that B and F had no family relationship, this term was used to connotatively mean 'friend.' Therefore, the term *ong'wi:se* was used to intensify interest in F. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), this is a positive politeness strategy that is used in social interaction to redress FTAs.

### **Ngo:sha 'Man' or 'Friend' versus Nki:ma 'Woman'**

Technically, the terms *ngo:sha* and *nki:ma* mean 'man' and 'woman', respectively. When these terms are used with their denotative meanings, they are usually used in an indirect way to make reference to men or women in their absence. The following extract exemplifies this argument:

(24) 1 B: *ol'v:shika nolwahasibhitali, [abhan'a:bhaki:ma ha bhingi]*

'If you go to hospital, you will find more women.'

2 D: [mh,  
gogushikila...]'Yes,  
that's obvious.'

3 A: *habingi lolv koti:nd'a:bhago:sha*

'They are more than men.'

4 D: *nyo, kanyo kibhikibhi.*

'That's obvious.'

In Extract (24), the terms *bhago:sha* 'men' in line 3 and *bhaki:ma* 'women' in line 2 were used indirectly to refer to all men and women, respectively. Therefore, it can be argued that when the address terms *nki:ma* 'woman' and *ngo:sha* 'man' are used in an indirect address, they usually retain their basic meanings. However, when these terms are used in a direct address, they connotatively mean 'friend'. With this meaning, they are usually used as strategies for expressing politeness in Sukuma. The following extract is illustrative:

(25) 1 A: *ehe: i'l'o:kol'dwi:nha, mho udwi:nha doho lakini. i ki ni:nagobhaja gi:ki, ngo:sha, ginehe?*

'It's ok, but if you wish to give us, you just give us. But, I asked you, friend, should we unload?'

2 B: *onene na:l'ni:gwa gi:ki, ahenaha gal'i:k'a:bhili; lmo lya ng'wasumi. nahnadamanile i gi:ki*

*ng'wing'wawilagwagoyi:kja hela. sawa, bhagichaga bhoyi doho.*

'I just heard that you are going to unload two boxes here: one for Sumi and another for me. I did not know if you agreed that you would be paid. Is that ok? They usually unload themselves.'

From Extract (25), A, the porter in line 1, was trying to express his dissatisfaction towards B's refusal to pay the money. In an attempt to express his complaint, A, addressed B as *ngo:sha* 'friend' in order to mitigate the threat inherent in the complaint. Therefore, the address term *ngo:sha* can be used to redress face threatening acts in Sukuma particularly when it is used in a direct address. Interestingly, however, the term *nki:ma* 'woman' is not commonly used in a direct address. These findings relate to the findings by Brown and Levinson (1987) who argue that the term friend is a positive politeness address term that is used to create an in-group identity towards the addressee when a face threatening act is presented.

### **Ng'wa:na ... 'Son of.../ Daughter of...**

*Ng'wa:na...* 'son of.../daughter of...' is an address term that is commonly used to express politeness in Sukuma. This address term has a wide range of usages from family to non-family members. At the family level, *ng'wa:na...* 'son of.../daughter of ...' is used in a direct address when a father or mother-in-law addresses his /her son or daughter-in-law. In Sukuma, it is a taboo for a father-in-law to mention the first name of his daughter-in-law. Likewise, it is a taboo for a mother-in-law to mention the first name of her son-in-law, be it in a direct or indirect address. To mitigate this, the address term *ng'wa:na...*

‘son of.../daughter of...’ is usually used. In this context, this address term is used as an avoidance strategy.

Another context where the address term *ng’wa:na...* ‘son of.../ daughter of ...’ is used is in the non-familial situation, particularly between people who know each other quite well, but they do not have a close relationship. The extract below is a conversation between a songster and a female member of the choir:

- (26) 1 A: *ng’wa:na sebha!*  
‘Daughter of Sebastian,’  
2 C2: *lama!*  
‘ Live long!’  
3 A: *natosha lwb.*  
‘It is enough now.’<sup>4</sup>  
C2: *odenhele kamooje*

‘Bring us one more; we shall allow you to leave’ In Extract (26), A, the songster, addressed C2 by her father’s name *ng’wana sebha* ‘daughter of Sebastian,’ and C2, in line 2, confirmed that she was addressed by an appropriate term by responding with a formal respectful reaction *lama* ‘live long’ as a repay for the respect accorded. However, when the social distance between the speaker and the addressee is great, usually a combination of *bha:bha ng’wa:na.../ma:yw ng’wa:na...* ‘father, son of... or mother, daughter of...’ is common as shown in Extract (27).

- (27) 1 D: *ol:mana bha:bha ng’wa:na sili [omo doliyombela...]*  
‘Do you know, father, son of  
Sylvester, what we are saying...’  
2 C: *[nwb winge ng’ung’ho,] ol’v:lnahela jako,*  
*olng’weshimiwa!*  
‘Even if you come from Ng’ung’ho, if you have money,  
you are honourable.’  
3 A: *ol’v:lnahela*  
*jako?* ‘If you have  
money,’  
4 C: *e;*  
‘Yes!’

From Extract (27), D in line 1 addressed A, the village

chairman, by double address terms as *bha:bha, ng'wa:na sili* 'father, son of Sylvester' due to the social distance that existed between them. In this context, D could not address A using his father's name alone because it could sound less polite to some extent. Perhaps *bha:bha* 'father' alone could do, but because D knew A quite well, then, a combination of the two was the best option. These findings concur with the findings by Moghaddam et al. (2013) who call these forms of address as teknonyms. According to them, these are nominal forms of address which define an addressee as a father, a brother, a wife or a daughter of someone else by expressing the addressee's relationship to another person (*ibid*, 56).

### First Names or Given Names

The findings of this study revealed that the first or given name is an address term that is usually used by members of the family, close friends and relatives. The following extract was taken from a food vending place, and it is an exchange between two close friends.

(28) 1 B: *luselele*,  
           'Luselele,'  
       2 F: *lama*  
           'Live long!'  
       3B: *kineh'o:ng'wi:se?*  
           'How are you, homey?'  
       4F: *mhola sana bwana*.  
           'Quite ok, master.'

In line 1, B, a woman in her 40s, addressed F (a man in his 40s) using his first name. B, in line 2 replied with a formal and respectful reaction: *lama* 'live long' to show that he was addressed appropriately. As the conversation went on, it was revealed that B and F were close friends, and they used to do business together in the past.

In some contexts, the first name is usually combined with the second person singular *bhe:bhe* 'you' which is not usually used alone as an address term. The extract below illustrates this argument:

(29) 1 A: *mgahayaga dɔhɔ guja gwishamba; ɔshika gwishamba  
ɔbhe:bhe?*

‘You just speak of going to the farm; can you go  
to farm?’

2 B: *FYI ((whistles)):: BHE:BHE, BHE:BHE*

*MAYALA!*

‘((Whistles)), YOU, YOU MAYALA!’

3 C: *e:*

‘Yes’

Extract (29) is an exchange between A and B. In the course of interaction, B saw his friend, Mayala, from a distant place, and drew his attention using the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular *bhe:bhe* ‘you’ and his first name *Mayala*. In turn, Mayala (named as C) in line 3) responded with an informal reaction *e:* ‘Yes’ which shows that he was addressed appropriately, but by a close friend or an age mate. Therefore, the first name is an address term in Sukuma, and it is used when the speaker knows the addressee quite well and when the social distance between them is small. This means that the first name is used in less formal contexts, and usually between interactants of equal status and close friends. Furthermore, the first name can be combined with the second person singular *bhe:bhe* ‘you’ depending on the social distance between the speaker and the addressee. These findings slightly differ from the findings by Gu (1990) who argues that although given or first names are used as address terms, among the Chinese, they are non-public, and they are reserved between lovers and occasionally by parents

## Conclusion

From the findings and discussions, it can generally be argued that address terms are very crucial in expressing politeness in Sukuma. This implies that the manipulation of different linguistic forms as address terms is not restricted to a few languages, but it cuts across cultures and languages. However, as cultures vary from one another, the application and implication of address terms also vary. From the discussion, it is safe to argue that both negative and positive politeness strategies can be expressed using

address terms in Sukuma. Negative politeness strategies generally intend to show respect towards addressee, and they are usually expressed through honorifics such as father, mother, father-in-law, mother-in-law, old man and village head, and these are usually reciprocal. On the contrary, positive politeness is expressed through terms of endearment such as dear, love, homey and friend. Moreover, first names are usually used when the addressee and the speaker know each other well or when they are close friends. However, it was revealed that mutual respect is more valued in this culture than mutual friendship. This study recommends that studies on individual languages, particularly Bantu languages, should be conducted in order to come up with plausible generalisation on the role of address terms in expressing politeness across Bantu languages.

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