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# Language use on Tanzanian Facebook: Linguistic features and trends

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**Abstract**

This paper examines linguistic features and language use trends in Tanzanian Facebook discourse. As in many African countries, social media has become an integral part of everyday communication in Tanzania, particularly among young people, making it important to understand its linguistic characteristics. The study employed an online survey and analysed 50 Facebook posts drawn from different users' accounts. The findings reveal that Tanzanian Facebook discourse is characterised by graphological features, including images and emojis, and orthographic features such as creative punctuation, vowel deletion, and number-letter substitutions, reflecting brevity and informality. The study also identified translanguaging practices, including slang, code-switching, language shifts, and vowel lengthening, which express linguistic creativity, identity, and social belonging. In addition, translation practices facilitate communication across linguistic boundaries and promote cross-cultural interaction in multilingual online environments. These findings demonstrate the dynamic relationship between language, digital communication, and cultural identity in contemporary Tanzania. The study concludes that social media has reshaped language use by encouraging innovative linguistic practices while maintaining communicative effectiveness. It recommends digital literacy programmes to enhance awareness of how these linguistic features influence readability and engagement and calls for further research on language use across different social media platforms and their long-term impact on Swahili and English in Tanzania.

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## 1. Introduction

As in many other parts of the world, Tanzania is making significant strides in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Facilitated by advancements in internet-based platforms, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, and Messenger have made communication much easier and more convenient than traditional face-to-face or postal communication. Social media has permeated the social space of many Tanzanians, and this practice has become an integral part of everyday communication.

Internet-based communication involves the use of electronic devices (computers and smartphones) and application software for people to share information with other interlocutors at any time and from any place (Boudjemaa & Mouhadjer, 2022). This kind of communication can be accessed throughout twenty-four (24) hours, hence making it suitable for all people (Nkhata & Jimaima, 2020).

Globally, Social media platforms have transformed language use by introducing new linguistic and communication practices. Lin and Qiu (2013), in a study of Facebook and Twitter in Singapore, found that Facebook status updates are more interpersonal and emotional, while Twitter posts are more casual and impressive. Similarly, Ruandraew et al. (2019) in Thailand observed that Facebook posts contain linguistic features such as slang, interjections, colloquial expressions, and orthographic creativity, including emoticons and onomatopoeia used to express emotions.

In Nigeria, Damkor (2022) found that Facebook posts related to COVID-19 were characterised by simple language, figures of speech, medical registers and collocations showing how social media language reflects contextual communicative needs. These studies show that Facebook language is dynamic, informal and highly context-dependent across different global settings.

In the African context, social media language reflects multilingualism and informal communication practices. Mwithi et al. (2016), in their study of Facebook language in Kenya, found that users employ non-standard English, acronyms, emoticons, word lengthening, code-switching, and

capitalisation. These Features vary in frequency and form but collectively reflect creative digital communication practices.

In Tanzania, studies show similar trends in language use on social media platforms. Malangwa 92019), in a study on English features in Swahili social media platforms such as WhatsApp, blogs and online forums found extensive borrowing, code-mixing and phonological adaptation into Kiswahili phonological structures. For example, *Ulikumbuka kunizimia kompyuta yangu besti angu*? (Did you remember to switch off my computer for me, my best friend?) The study revealed that the presence of words like kompyuta deforms the Kiswahili phonological system, which requires a CVCV pattern, because they are borrowed from English.

Pfeiffer et al. (2014) are of the view that Facebook is among the most popular internet-based sites in Tanzania. According to their study, the most frequently reported websites young people visit are Facebook (73%), YouTube (38%), and Twitter (20%); furthermore, 20% report accessing their email accounts, while 5% report accessing Wikipedia. The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) (2022) reported that for the period from July to September 2022, the social media platforms leading in internet service bandwidth usage (in GB) were Facebook with a total of 2,595,691,922 GB (2.6 billion GB), followed by YouTube with a total of 1,919,578,557 GB. In the quarter ending December 2022, Facebook again led in bandwidth consumption, totalling 90.01 trillion GB, primarily due to Facebook video services. YouTube ranked second with a total of 34.97 trillion GBs, reflecting the high bandwidth demands of video streaming compared to other services. The data indicate the accelerating trend of social media usage in Tanzania.

Facebook was developed as an advanced means of communication, which people can be linked to and share information, ideas, thoughts and feelings by utilising various devices and features provided in Facebook (Triana et al., 2020). The integration of internet-based services for human communication and interaction has paved the way for the birth of various styles of language use. Crystal (2006) argued that electronic language remains an innovative form of communication and a hybrid linguistic variety that encompasses features of colloquial language in social media posts. He further added that the main supposition is that texting features a

style of graphics, the use of abbreviations, and language deviations used by the younger generation to fulfil their communication needs.

This study investigates Facebook language use in Tanzanian social media, with a focus on grapho-orthographic elements and translanguaging strategies employed on Facebook posts. According to Nwala and Tamunobelema (2019), the language we understand and know has several varieties that are defined by region, occupation, or social context. Facebook language is often informal, as users typically communicate in a casual, conversational style that includes abbreviations and relaxed grammar. However, it is not always informal, as the level of formality can vary with context, audience, and purpose. Graphology is an aspect of language that transcends orthography; it is the whole system of writing, including punctuation, paragraphing, spacing, and the like (Alabi, 2007). Similarly, Adegoju (2008) defines graphology as the study of the written features of language, such as spelling, capitalisation, layout of the text, lists, font size, underlining, hyphenation, italicisation, organisation, colour, pictures, and images. Graphology is not limited to these features; it may also include spacing, punctuation, diagrams, bold, and more, which play an important role in creating posts. Furthermore, the social media language is also linked to translanguaging. Initially, the term was used to characterise a bilingual language practice observed among Welsh students.

Williams (1996) coined "translanguaging" as a pedagogical concept to explain how bilingual and multilingual individuals naturally use their languages in daily life to interpret and engage with their bilingual environments. It is a term originating from Welsh *trawsieithu*, later adopted in English to describe pedagogical practices in which bilingual learners flexibly draw on resources from their full linguistic repertoire, often two languages, for learning and meaning-making in educational settings (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). According to Garcıa (2009), the theory was extended beyond the education system; it was further regarded as a strategy that bilingual societies use in their everyday life to share meaning, experiences, knowledge and understanding. According to Mapunda and Ilonga (2022), translanguaging is a strategy that encompasses linguistic innovations such as borrowing, translation, extensions of meaning, dialects, pidgins, lengthening of sounds, language styles, emojis, stickers, and slang. Dumrukcic (2020) argued that translanguaging enhances the ability to communicate more freely and

openly. Tzirides (2022) notes that in today's globalised world, people communicate not only through their first language but also by drawing on all the languages they know, often complemented by multimodal resources such as images, videos, emoticons, memes, and other semiotic elements. This practice of using one's full linguistic and semiotic repertoire for communication is referred to as translanguaging.

Despite the available studies that address Facebook language in the Tanzanian context, limited attention has been given to a systematic analysis of linguistic features such as graphological, orthographic, and translanguaging practices in Tanzanian Facebook posts. This creates a research gap regarding how Tanzanian users creatively deploy linguistic resources in digital communication. Therefore, this study investigated language use in Facebook posts to highlight linguistic features and trends. The study addresses one objective: examining the linguistic features of Tanzanian Facebook discourse. The following section focuses on theoretical orientation; the next section presents methods of data collection and analysis; the third section presents the findings and discussion; and the fourth section concludes.

### 1.1 Theoretical Background

This study is guided by the Translanguaging Theory, which originated in Welsh bilingual education in the 1980s. The term *translanguaging* was coined by Cen Williams and refers to the pedagogical use of two languages in teaching and learning (Lewis et al., 2012). Later, Garcia (2009) expanded the concept beyond the classroom, defining it as the use of a single integrated linguistic repertoire by bilinguals and multilinguals to share meaning, experiences, knowledge and understanding in everyday communication.

Furthermore, theoretical developments view translanguaging as a broader communicative practice. Garcia and Li (2017) and Li Wei (2018) emphasise that it involves fluid language use that crosses traditional language boundaries in both social and institutional contexts. In digital communication, these practices often interact with multimodal resources. Lee (2016) notes that online communication is characterised by multilingual practices, code-mixing, and the integration of multimodal elements such as emojis, images, and non-standard spellings, all of which contribute to meaning-making in digital spaces. Therefore, this study

employs Translanguaging Theory to examine how Facebook users in Tanzania draw on their full available linguistic resources to construct meaning in digital communication.

## 2. Methods and Procedures

This study is qualitative in nature and adopts a descriptive survey design to analyse linguistic features of Facebook posts in Tanzania. Nwankwo (2013, as cited in Nwala and Tamunobelema, 2019) explains that a descriptive research design is one in which data are collected from a sample selected from the population to describe specific characteristics of the phenomenon at the time of the study. In this case, the study focused on a purposively selected sample of 50 Facebook posts to investigate linguistic trends and features. As Guest et al. (2006) argue, there is no conventional rule for sample size in qualitative studies; some scholars propose a sample size of 12-15, especially in relatively homogeneous populations, to achieve saturation. The researchers studied only posts containing linguistic features. To collect the data, researchers took screenshots of Facebook posts from their own Facebook accounts using a computer. The posts were purposively selected; however, the researchers limited their selection to posts from October to December 2024 to capture recent trends and changes in features associated with Facebook language.

The content analysis method was used to examine the grapho-orthographic and translanguaging features of the Facebook posts. The presentation of the findings is descriptive, supported by extracts from the Facebook posts. However, ethical issues were also observed as data were handled anonymously, names and photos of the Facebook users in the extracts incorporated in the study were hidden to ensure rights and dignity were protected, and the data were used for the purpose of the study only.

## 3. Results

This section presents findings on language use on the Facebook platform in Tanzania. The findings are presented and discussed in line with the objective of examining the main linguistic attributes of Tanzanian Facebook discourse. According to Androutsopoulos (2015), multilingual practices on Facebook vary among users and are shaped by communication styles, social contexts, and individuals' diverse linguistic resources. The findings are presented using extracts to illustrate linguistic features in Facebook posts.

These extracts may encompass multiple related linguistic features. However, the interpretation focuses on one feature at a time to ensure a clear understanding of the findings. This section discusses graphological, orthographic, and translanguaging features in Facebook discourse.

## 3.1 *Graphological Features*

Graphology is concerned with the whole system of writing, including spelling, punctuation and paragraphing. In this section, these features are presented as used in Facebook discourse.

### *Picture/Images*

The study found that Facebook users frequently use photos or images accompanied by text. Typically, the text explains or complements the visual content. Figure 1 shows Facebook posts accompanied by images/photos. In one case, the texts directly relate to the attached images/photos, while in the other, the texts explicitly state the connection between the images or photos and the message. Readers are encouraged to consider the context and timing in which the posts were made.







**Figure 1: Pictures/Images Source: Facebook Posts (2024)**

On Facebook, some posts correspond to the shared image or photo, while others do not match it. Van House (2011) argues that sharing photos or images is a crucial aspect of communication between interlocutors. Studies have shown that users share photos to fulfil various needs, such as expressing emotions, seeking attention, self-disclosure, habit, information sharing, and responding to social influence (Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016). Additionally, reducing loneliness has been identified as an important reason for posting photos with friends on social media (Pittman, 2015).

***Emojis***

Negishi (2014) argued that emojis are currently popular and have become widely used in mobile communication. Additionally, the study revealed that users on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) often employ emojis, similar to those used by Facebook and WhatsApp users. This study also found that Facebook users employ emojis in their posts and comments. The emojis are meaningful when used either alone or alongside a text message. Each emoji has a standardised meaning that users generally understand when they are used. Emojis are used worldwide, although their meanings may vary across contexts and cultures. Figure 2 shows posts that include emojis.

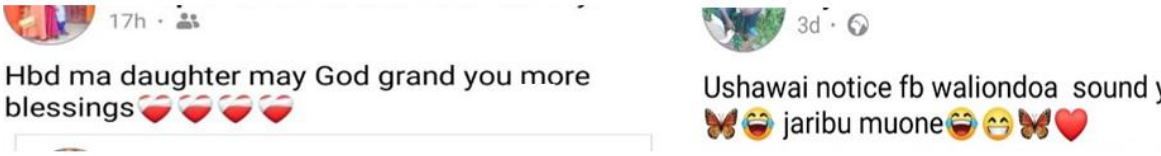



**Figure 2:** Emojis

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

In Figure 2, the emojis are accompanied by a text message; despite the overuse of emojis, they have meaning on their own. However, some Facebook users use multiple emojis at once to emphasise a point, even though they have varied meanings. These emojis are also used on other social media platforms with similar meanings, as they are often universal, though their meanings can vary by context and culture. Table 1 presents various emojis and their meanings.

**Table 1**: Showing some of the emojis used by Facebook users in their posts

| **Emoji** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|
| 😂 (Face with Tears of Joy) | Used to express laughter, amusement, or when something is hilariously funny. |
| 🙌 (Raising Hands) | Celebration, victory, or expressing gratitude. |
| 🔥 (Fire) | Something amazing, impressive, or exciting. |
| ❤️ (Red Heart) | Love, affection, or appreciation |
| 😎 (Smiling Face with Sunglasses) | Coolness, confidence, or pride. |
| 💪 (Flexed Biceps) | Strength, resilience, or motivation. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 🙏 (Folded Hands) | Prayer, gratitude, or a polite request. |
| 😅 (Grinning Face with Sweat) | Nervous laughter, relief, or awkward situations. |
| 🎉 (Party Popper) | Celebration, excitement, or congratulations. |
| 🤔 (Thinking Face) | Contemplation, curiosity, or doubt. |
| 😭 (Loudly Crying Face) | Intense emotion, whether sadness or overwhelming joy. |
| 🙄 (Face with Rolling Eyes) | Disinterest, sarcasm, or annoyance. |
| 💔 (Broken Heart) | Sadness, heartbreak, or disappointment. |
| 🦋 (Butterfly) | Transformation, beauty, freedom, or hope. |

Source: https://www.makeuseof.com/top-emojis-explained-cheat-sheet/

***Hashtags and Mention Symbol***

A hashtag is a word or phrase that starts with the symbol # and briefly indicates what a message is about. Burikova and Ovchinnikova (2021) assert that the functions of hashtags are determined by the types of word-formation and graphic usage. In a communication context, hashtags are used to unite people on a network-based platform such as Facebook, directing communication towards a common topic. In the posts surveyed, hashtags were observed to appear at the beginning of the posts or before a word or phrase. For instance, Figure 3 shows #WasafiMedia and #Goodmorning as examples of hashtags appearing in Facebook posts. These features are used by Facebook users to fulfil communication needs. In the case of #WasafiMedia and #Goodmorning, these hashtags aim to help users easily access content related to the "Goodmorning" session on WasafiMedia. Hashtags function as digital labels that group related posts, increasing the visibility, searchability, and accessibility of content on the platform.




**Figure 3:** Hashtags and Mention Symbol

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

Also, Facebook language is accompanied by the use of the mention symbol @ is a linguistic feature in Facebook discourse that enables users to tag or address specific individuals, groups, or entities directly in posts, comments, or replies. It fosters personalisation by making conversations more engaging and interactive while highlighting specific users or content. Commonly used to notify someone, acknowledge contributions, or promote brands and organisations, the symbol enhances interactivity and builds a sense of digital community. For example, Figure 3 shows the use of the mentions symbol in posts such as kigezo ni lazima uwe ume-follow page ya @betika.co.tz (the criterion is following the page @betika.co.tz) and Goodmorning ya @wasafifm (the good morning of Wasafi FM) to ensure the tagged person is notified and involved in the conversation.

### *Capitalisation*

The study revealed that most Facebook posts involve capitalising certain words or phrases, and the context for using capital letters varies depending on users' intentions. Some posts exhibit a mixture of upper-case (capital letters) and lower-case (small letters), while others are written entirely in upper-case. The capitalisation serves multiple purposes, including enhancing visibility, emphasising specific ideas, drawing attention to key points, and expressing strong emotions such as excitement, anger, or urgency.

For instance, posts with mixed capitalisation often use upper-case letters selectively to highlight a particular word or phrase within a predominantly lower-case context, such as *Ni MUNGU pekee!* "It is only God". This approach ensures the emphasis is clear without overwhelming the entire text. On the other hand, posts written entirely in upper-case, such as *AMBAO MNASUBIRI MUUJIZA NAOMBA MKOMENTI KWA HERUFI KUBWA* "Those who are waiting for a miracle, please comment in upper case" are often perceived as urgent or shouting, signalling strong emotions or critical announcements.

Additionally, the choice of capitalisation can reflect a user's personal style, creativity, or familiarity with digital conventions. In some cases, capitalised words are used to mimic the tone of traditional print media headlines, lending a sense of authority or urgency to the post. Figure 4 shows that while uppercase letters appear less frequently than lowercase letters, their strategic placement significantly enhances the post's communicative impact. This demonstrates how capitalisation functions as a visual tool in Facebook discourse to reinforce meaning and engage readers.




**Figure 4:** Capital Letters Source: Facebook Posts (2024)

### *3.2 Orthographic Features*

This includes features such as punctuation, substitution of numbers for letters, accent stylisation, and deletion of vowels.

#### *Punctuation marks*

Punctuation marks are grammatical devices used to convey different grammatical meanings. Key punctuation marks include periods (.), which end statements; commas (,), which separate items or clauses; question marks (?), which indicate direct questions; and exclamation marks (!), which convey strong emotion. Proper punctuation ensures clear and effective communication. In Kiswahili, punctuation marks (commas, full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, colons, etc.) are similar to those

in English and generally follow the same rules. The punctuation marks are used only once, not doubled, tripled, or repeated; single use is the standard.

The study found that punctuation marks, as grammatical devices, were not used in accordance with standard language norms. Non-standard punctuation was observed among most Facebook users, including the overuse of punctuation marks such as full stops, question marks, and exclamation marks. Crystal (2006) notes that computer-mediated communication often features unconventional punctuation such as irregular full stops, hyphens, repeated commas, question marks, exclamation marks, or multiple punctuation marks. Magwaro et al. (2018) also found that Facebook users employed creative language patterns, including phoneticons, non-standard punctuation, and syllabograms, to communicate their intended messages. For example, capital letters and multiple full stops implied silence and stress.

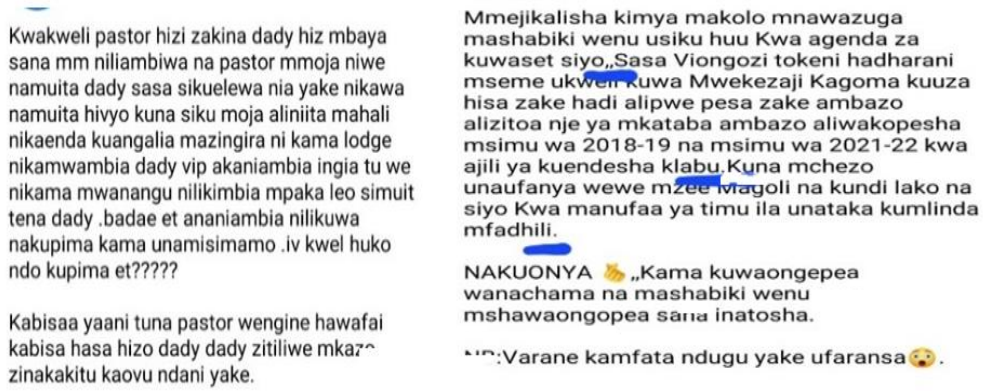



**Figure 5:** Non-standard punctuation

**Source:** Field data (2024)

***Substitution of Numbers for Letters/ Putting Numbers in Places of Letters***

Numbers are used instead of syllables or words; this was found in the surveyed posts. For example, the number 2 replaces the Swahili syllable *tu* in words such as “ki2” instead of kitu, “m2” instead of mtu, “2lia” instead of tulia, and 7 replaces *saba* in words such as “7bu” instead of *sababu*. According to Verheijen (2016), this is referred to as an alphanumeric homophone. Farina and Lyddy (2011) identify another type of substitution,

which is termed phonetic reduction. According to Dilts (2013), phonetic reduction is the deletion of segments from words. This phenomenon was also observed in the analysed posts. For instance, the English word time is written as "tym". This is shown in Figure 6:

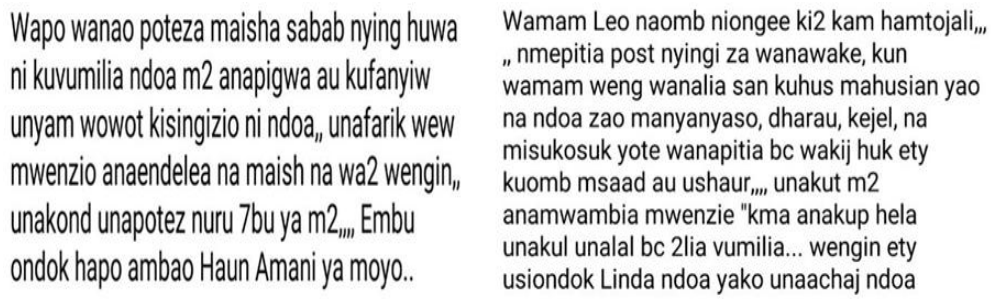



**Figure 6:** Substitution of Numbers for Letters

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

***Accent stylisation***

According to Lyddy et al. (2014), accent stylisation refers to the practice of writing words as they are pronounced in casual speech. This phenomenon is evident in some analysed Facebook posts where users replicate spoken language patterns in their writing as in Figure 7. For example, English words like "dei" are used instead of "day," "u" for "you," "wat" stands in for "what", "*maza*" for "mother", "*skuli*" for "school" and "gud" for "good." This stylistic choice reflects phonetic realisation derived from spoken pronunciation, which can make written communication more informal, relatable, and reflective of the spoken language. Such stylisation, including non-standard spellings such as *dei* for *"day"*, is often employed to create a conversational and speech-like tone, reduce typing effort, and signal linguistic creativity.

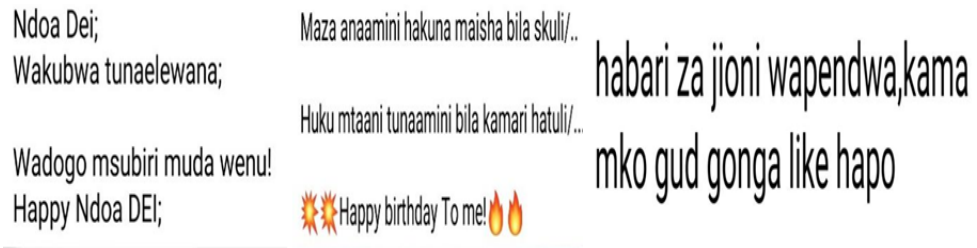



**Figure 7:** Accent Stylisation

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

### *Deletion of vowel and consonant letters*

Facebook posts are also characterised by the deletion of consonants or vowels in words, resulting in shortened forms. This phenomenon is commonly observed in both Swahili and English, where users delete certain letters to create abbreviated versions of words. Deletions are typically motivated by the need for brevity, efficiency, and the constraints of typing on digital platforms. For instance, in English, "hbd" is used instead of "happy birthday," "sms" for "message or short message" and Swahili words such as *kwa sababu "because"* is abbreviated as "*kwsb*", *rafiki "a friend"* becomes "rfk", *wakati* "time or duration" becomes "*wkt*", showcasing the omission of vowels and consonants for simplicity. These words can be found in written forms, particularly in informal contexts, since contractions are not formally accepted. Below is a table highlighting examples of shortened words found in the analysed posts:

**Table 2:** Shortened Words and Their Standard Orthography

| **Facebook Orthography** | **Standard Orthography** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|---|
| *Hy* | *Haya* | ok or alright |
| *Hbd* | *Happy birthday* | Happy birthday |
| *Lv* | *Love* | love |
| *Usk* | *Usiku* | night |
| *Hpn* | *Hapana* | no or not |
| *Jmn* | *Jamani* | oh my (used to express exclamation) |
| *Fb* | *Facebook* | Facebook |
| *Ktk* | *Katika* | within or inside |
| *Nk* | *Nakadhalika* | and the like or and so on |
| *Plz* | *Please* | please |
| *Ur* | *Your or you are* | your or you are |
| *Tyr* | *Tayari* | already |
| *Nxt* | *Next* | next |

**Source**: Facebook Posts (2024)

As shown in Table 2, the use of shortened words by Facebook users is influenced by the need for brevity and by the adaptation of modern communication norms on social media. They are also used to save time and space while remaining understandable in the informal, fast-paced nature of social media interactions. Moreover, the deletion of consonants and vowels in Facebook posts reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of digital communication. It reduces the effort and time required to type, aligns with an informal and conversational tone, and sometimes signals linguistic creativity or cultural identity. However, while such practices enhance efficiency, they can also compromise readability or comprehension, especially for audiences unfamiliar with the shortened forms. All in all, this linguistic trend highlights the interplay between functionality and style in social media discourse.

### *3.3 Translanguaging Features*

The surveyed posts exhibited translanguaging features such as slang, code-switching, translation, Vowel lengthening and nativisation of foreign lexical items.

### *Slang*

The analysis revealed that Facebook language is rich in slang, reflecting the users' creativity, cultural identity, and the informal nature of social media discourse. Slang words and phrases are often used to convey humour, create a sense of solidarity, and establish relatability among users. Slang was observed in both Swahili and English, as well as in a blend of the two.




**Figure 8:** Slangs
**Source:** Facebook Posts (2024)

The use of slang contributes to the informality and relatability of Facebook discourse by reflecting casual, everyday speech patterns. It also increases appeal among younger users and those within similar social or occupational groups. Furthermore, shared slang fosters a sense of community by

creating in-groups among users who recognise and use the same expressions.

However, it may also alienate or confuse those unfamiliar with the terms or the cultural contexts in which they are used. The prevalence of slang in Facebook posts highlights its role in shaping digital communication, reflecting linguistic creativity, cultural diversity, and the evolving nature of language in social media spaces.

**Table 3**: **Slangs used in Facebook posts**

| **Origin** | **Slang** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|---|
| Unusual | *Noma* | Dangerous/amazing |
| Mining area | *Chimbo* | Hidden place/important place |
| To spit | *Limetema* | Released/provided benefits |
| Rock | *Mwamba* | A gentle man |
| Children | *Wana* | Colleagues |
| A child | *Chalii* | Colleague |

**Source:** Facebook Posts (2024)

The slang shown in Table 3 above is also used in everyday contexts beyond Facebook. They are used by people of a similar age group in the same way and with the same meaning, for instance, *mwamba* 'a gentleman ', wana 'colleagues', and *chalii* 'colleague'.

***Code-switching***

Interactions in a multilingual society are always characterised by code-switching as universal linguistic creativity employed by speakers of various languages (Mapunda & Ilonga, 2022). Code-switching is the situation whereby a speaker shifts from one language or variety to another during the course of a text or conversation (Al-Qaysi & Al-Emran, 2017). Facebook posts are associated with code-switching between Swahili and English. This is because almost all Tanzanians are multilingual, particularly in two or more community languages, Swahili, the lingua franca and official language, and English, the second official language. In Tanzania, English is taught as a subject in primary schools and used as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary schools, while Swahili is the medium of instruction in primary schools. Johansson (2012) observes that code-switching is regarded as a phenomenon that prevails in bilingual societies

where individuals have the opportunity to employ more than one language to share information with other people. Individuals who speak more than one language, bilinguals, can code-switch to communicate. The Facebook posts contain mixtures of Swahili and English at different word, phrase, and sentence levels. For instance, at the word level: *hakupost* "he/she did not post", *usiniwish* "do not wish me", *kulike* "to like", *kunifollow* "to follow me", kujiselfie "to make a selfie" and kunileftisha "to remove". Here, the borrowed English words are attached with a Swahili syllable at the beginning of the word to suit the Swahili Morphology. Also, code-mixing can occur at the phrase or sentence level.

We have identified several code-switches as used by Facebook users in their posts, such as '*Challenge accepted kama hakupost mteme tu'*, '*Happy birthday to me usiniwish just send me money kwa mahitaji ya mashuka…*', and '*Used from UK nipgie*….' These are constructions with code-switching from English to Kiswahili. Also, the sentences include code-mixing at the word level, for instance, *hakupost* "did not post" and *Usiniwish "*do not wish." According to Hafid and Sahril (2022), the patterns of code-switching are categorised into three types, namely: tag-switching, extrasentential switching, and inter-sentential switching. In this study, tag-switching involves adding words or phrases to sentences; for example, in Figure 6, the word "ety", which is used as the Swahili word 'eti', engages interlocutors. Inter-sentential code-switching is the ability of a speaker to shift between languages across sentences, and intra-sentential code-switching involves switching within a sentence or clause. For example, in a sentence *like "Used from UK nipgie..." or "used from UK call...", code-switching occurs within a sentence, with both English and Swahili words* used. Therefore, while the linguistic process is similar, Facebook code-switching is more stylised and performative, shaped by the public and written nature of social media communication, rather than purely conversational dynamics.

***Translation***

This is another feature of the translanguaging approach, which integrates multiple languages to reflect the dynamic way people communicate across linguistic boundaries. It facilitates cross-cultural communication, allowing users from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage with content. In Tanzania, Facebook users use both English and Swahili. Many users are conversant in Kiswahili as a *lingua franca* used across the country, while English is an official language but is used by a smaller number of

individuals, particularly those who have learnt It in formal or informal settings. Therefore, translation assists those who do not understand one of the languages. If one does not understand English, the message will be delivered through Swahili and vice versa. This is observed in the figure below, as used by Facebook users.




**Figure 9:** Translation

**Source:** Facebook Posts (2024)

***Vowel lengthening***

According to Ilonga (2023), vowel lengthening is a creative prosodic feature of languages that is usually employed in conversation. This feature is rarely used in written language. This is the elongation or addition of letters, usually vowel sounds, at the beginning or end of a word, typically to express emotions. In the Facebook posts studied, final addition of vowels was observed, for instance, in words like *mamboooo* (how is it), *ziwaniiii* (at the lake), *sanaaaaaa* (so much), *jamaniiiii* (guys), *weziiiiii* (thieves). The vowel added to the words has no direct meaning, but it is an extension used for emphasis or to express emotion. However, the study revealed that Facebook users frequently employ this feature by elongating or adding vowels, particularly at the end of words, to convey emphasis, exaggeration, or heightened emotional states. This stylistic choice adds an expressive quality to the posts, allowing users to mimic the prosodic elements of speech in writing.

In the current study, vowel lengthening was prominently observed in Swahili and hybrid phrases. For instance, users wrote words like *mamboooo* (how is it?), *ziwaniiii* (at the lake), *sanaaaaaa* (a lot), *jamaniiiii* (guys), and *weziiiiii* (thieves). These elongated forms do not alter the core meaning of the words but serve to amplify their emotional weight. Also, vowel lengthening occurs at the beginning of the word especially in interjections to express emotions. For instance, the word '*Ohohoooo' repeats* the letters *Ohoh* to indicate surprise or emotional intensity as it is an interjection. However, most of the posts surveyed exhibited lengthening at the end of the words. Vowel lengthening enhances the expressiveness of Facebook posts, making them more engaging and emotionally resonant. While it deviates from standard orthography, it aligns with the informal and dynamic nature of social media communication. This creative adaptation bridges the gap between spoken and written language, enabling users to convey a nuanced emotional tone that resonates with their audience.

***Nativisation of foreign words***

According to Ilonga (2023), nativisation is the process of adapting foreign words to fit the phonological, morphological and syntactic structure of a recipient language. In Facebook posts, the users adapt foreign words to suit the linguistic, cultural and social norms of the society around them. This process occurs when the language lacks sufficient vocabulary; it therefore requires borrowing from other languages to fit its contexts. For instance, the development of technology has led to an increase in new modern goods and terms which are not present in the recipient language. Therefore, such terms are adapted as they are in the source language and nativized to fit the target language's grammatical rules. For example, words such as *simenti* 'cement', *sakramenti* 'sacrament', *mechi* 'match', *tiketi* 'ticket', and shati 'shirt' are nativized from English into Swahili. These words are adapted and used in Kiswahili. These words are also used in other interactions.

The process of nativisation is not limited to standard Swahili; such features can also be observed in social media platforms like Facebook. Magwaro et al. (2018) argue that Facebook is a social media platform that facilitates open interaction through posts. It serves as a space where individuals share their thoughts and multimedia content, allowing friends to engage and respond. The platform also supports anonymity, enabling users to

communicate in any language without limitations. Due to its informal nature, users tend to adopt distinct linguistic styles in their conversations, including nativised words. Similarly, Crystal (2006) asserts that on Facebook, users can freely choose their preferred language since it is an unofficial context. They can write and share texts, pictures, and videos without fear of surveillance.

## 4. Discussion

The findings in this study reveal that Tanzanian Facebook users employ various linguistic features that reflect creativity, cultural identity, and the dynamic nature of online discourse. The findings revealed the use of graphological, orthographic, and translanguaging features, which are discussed below.

Facebook users employ graphological features that emphasise the visual aspects of communication, including images, emojis, numbers, hashtags, and capitalisation. Pictures and photos frequently complement text, enhancing both the emotional and informational impact of the message. In the Tanzanian context, Facebook users often share photos to maintain connections and express emotions, among other purposes. Goh et al. (2009) argued that sharing photos online serves as a means of fulfilling various social interaction needs, including self-expression, self-presentation, communication, and the fostering of social relationships. Additionally, photo sharing can serve functional purposes, such as facilitating personal and collaborative tasks. Emojis are also widely utilised to convey emotions or emphasise messages; emojis can stand alone or accompany text. Their overuse often emphasises certain sentiments. Emojis create a sense of immediate physical context by reducing perceived physical distance and fostering social closeness (Tagg & Lyons, 2021).

Furthermore, emojis can enhance the emotional impact of communication (Tang & Hew, 2018) by allowing readers to visualise the user's expressions and emotional state, thereby addressing the lack of nonverbal cues inherent in text-based interactions. Using hashtags and mentions helps organise conversations, unite users on common topics, and enhance interaction by tagging individuals or entities. According to O'Grady and Dobrovolsky (2017), as cited in Kimambo (2024), symbols such as hashtags (#) and at-tags (@) function as a type of logographic writing, representing

specific words or concepts. The symbols # and @ are used to signify the topic and address, respectively. Facebook users utilise hashtags to engage in broader conversations on social media, steer communication, and capture viewers' attention. Similarly, viewers rely on hashtags to efficiently find relevant content across the Facebook platform. Capitalisation serves various functions, from emphasising specific points to mimicking urgency or strong emotions. Nishimura (2007) suggests that the use of capitalisation within a sentence is intended to emphasise certain words. Similarly, Magwaro et al. (2018) note that capital letters are often employed to draw attention and ensure the text is noticeable to all readers. A similar pattern is observed among Facebook users in Tanzania, who use capital letters to enhance visibility and draw attention.

Also, Facebook users employ orthographic features related to spelling adaptations and punctuation: punctuation marks are used non-standardly, such as excessive exclamation marks or ellipses, reflecting informality and creativity. Crystal (2006) observes that non-standard punctuation is likely to occur in computer-mediated communication (CMC), including the use of full stops, hyphens, repeated commas, or multiple exclamation marks. He attributes this phenomenon to the expression of stress or attitude. Substitution of numbers for letters often replaces syllables for brevity (e.g., "*ki2*" for "*kitu*") to mean "thing". This is what Mapunda (2023) has referred to as leetspeak. This is also observed in a study by Magwaro et al. (2018), which noted the use of numbers in Facebook posts, such as "*m2*" in place of "*mtu*" (meaning "a person") and "*ngozi2*" instead of "*ngozi tu*" (meaning "only a foreskin"). While these words could have been more straightforward if written conventionally, the use of the number "2" likely indicates an effort to align with the linguistic norms of other Facebook users. Moreover, they refer to this phenomenon as the use of syllabograms, where numbers replace sounds in words. They describe it as "number usage in place of homophones." In the English language, Facebook users often substitute numbers for sounds, such as 8 for et, 4 for four, 2 for two and 1 for one. In the current study, the analysed Swahili texts revealed that interlocutors frequently used the numeral "2" in place of the syllable "-tu-." Accent stylisation, in which words are written phonetically (e.g., "u" for "you"), reflects casual speech patterns. Plester et al. (2008) describe accent stylisation as a form of writing commonly associated with youth, referring to it as a "youth code" often employed to add humour to conversations.

Deletion of vowels/consonants, including shortened forms like “hbd” (happy birthday), demonstrates a trend toward brevity and efficiency. This feature appears to be common in technology communication; it is also known as a combination of letters. The combination of letters to produce specific sounds and meaningful words, along with the omission of vowels in spelling, is considered a characteristic feature of “Netspeak” (Crystal, 2006; Ross, 2006). Some words exhibiting this feature are universally recognised, while others are only understandable to online users within the same virtual community studied in this research.

Moreover**,** translanguaging features are also evident in Facebook users’ posts, where people employ available linguistic resources to meet their communication needs. These features highlight the multilingual practices of Tanzanian Facebook users: Slang is a translanguaging feature common in both Swahili and English, fostering relatability and reflecting cultural identity. Slang refers to non-standard words or phrases commonly used in informal contexts to express emotions or feelings. It reflects the attitudes of the group or subculture that adopts it and evolves over time. Currently, teenagers frequently engage with social media platforms, leading to the widespread use of slang through applications like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat (Chomphoonuch, Ananya, Hanun, & Ubonrat, 2022). To add, code-switching is a prevalent feature due to Tanzania’s multilingual nature, involving shifts between Swahili and English at various levels (word, phrase, or sentence). This aligns with the study by Jagero, Mohochi, and Indede (2013), which investigated Swahili usage in blog discourse and its impact on language development. Their findings revealed that bloggers frequently employed unconventional abbreviations, as well as code-mixing and code-switching. Another is translation, which is used to accommodate diverse audiences by providing bilingual content. Facebook users employ translation from either Swahili to English or English to Swahili. This gives a chance to a person who is not familiar with one of the languages to understand the message attached to the post. Moreover, vowel lengthening is another translanguaging feature that adds emotional emphasis and mimics spoken language patterns. According to Knas (2006), phoneticons are graphemic representations of voice qualities and sound imitations in writing. They often involve the use of multiple vowels to convey particular sounds or expressions. Lastly, nativisation of foreign words refers to the process by which words or phrases from one language

are adapted into another language. This adaptation typically involves changes to the word's pronunciation, spelling, or usage to make it fit the phonological, morphological, or syntactic patterns of the adopting language. Ilonga (2023) argues that the nativisation of foreign words undergoes structural and phonological changes to correspond to Swahili's morpho-phonological system. Facebook users often adjust the structure and phonology of English words to align with the morpho-phonological system of Swahili.

## 5. Conclusion

This study on Tanzanian Facebook discourse reveals the dynamic and creative nature of online communication through diverse linguistic features. Graphological elements like images, emojis, hashtags, mentions, and capitalisation enhance expressiveness and engagement, with emojis conveying emotions and hashtags fostering connectivity. Orthographic features, such as non-standard punctuation, number-letter substitutions, accent stylisation, and vowel deletion, reflect the informal, fast-paced nature of digital communication, emphasising brevity and creativity. Translanguaging features, including slang, code-switching, translation, vowel lengthening, and the nativisation of foreign words, highlight the fluidity of Tanzanian users' language, blending Swahili and English to express inclusivity. However, these features may also be found in other social media contexts and everyday communication, as they are characteristics of informal communication. Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that literacy programmes emphasise how different linguistic features affect readability and audience engagement. Also, further studies should explore the long-term impact of these linguistic features on Swahili and English usage in Tanzania. Long-term effects can be both positive and negative; positive effects add to growth, but negative effects, if not overseen, can potentially distort formal language. Additionally, other studies can be conducted on the Tanzanian Facebook discourse and other social media platforms to assess linguistic variation.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this article.

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**Data Availability Statement**

The data analysed in this study consist of publicly available Facebook posts collected from open user accounts. All extracts supporting the findings are included in this article.

**Use of Artificial Intelligence**

No AI was used to obtain, analyse, interpret or write the article. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the study.

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