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University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Gendered Discourse and Identity Construction in *Mipasho Taarab*: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Utalijua Jiji*

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Loveluck Philip Muro[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines how language constructs and contests gendered identities in the Tanzanian Mipasho Taarab song Utalijua Jiji by East African Melody. Employing Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), the paper has two objectives: (1) to analyse the discursive strategies used to construct and contest gendered identities, and (2) to examine how linguistic choices reflect broader sociocultural gender ideologies. The song, Utalijua Jiji, was purposively selected, transcribed, translated, and analysed. Gender-related lyrics were first identified manually and subsequently examined to determine the discursive practices, power relations, and ideological meanings they construct and reproduce. The findings reveal four key strategies, including polarisation, lexical antithesis, shame and surveillance, and appropriation of masculine authority, which position women within frameworks of morality, domesticity, and relational worth. Additionally, the song enforces gender ideologies by contrasting the ideal, domesticated woman with a deviant, urban rival, valorising obedience and male approval while framing female assertiveness as deviance. Male love functions as conditional approval, reinforcing patriarchal control and regulating femininity through performance. The study argues that Mipasho Taarab is not just an entertainment genre, but a powerful communicative site where gender identities, power and social struggles are negotiated. It recommends further intersectional gendered linguistic research on other popular cultural genres and audience reception of such genres.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, discursive strategies, gendered identities, gender ideologies, Mipasho Taarab, Utalijua Jiji*

Introduction

Music functions as a social meaning-making system through which individuals and communities construct, challenge, and negotiate identities, power relations, and cultural norms. Language, as an integral

[1] **Corresponding author:**
Loveluck Philip Muro, Department of Languages and Literature, Dar es Salaam University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 2329, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, E-mail: loveluck.muro@udsm.ac.tz

component of musical expression, carries both overt and covert meanings that resonate within specific sociocultural settings. Scholars in sociolinguistics and ethnomusicology have long acknowledged that music is not merely an artistic form but a discursive site where ideologies, identities, and power relations are symbolically produced and reproduced (Blommaert, 2005; Finnegan, 1989). In this sense, the linguistic choices embedded in musical genres serve not only aesthetic but also ideological purposes, often reflecting broader societal discourses. The interrelationship between music and language extends beyond entertainment into social commentary and identity construction. According to Terkourafi (2011), musical discourse serves as a site of stylisation, where singers strategically use language to construct social personas and perform identities.This perspective aligns with Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistics, which views language as a tool for indexing social meanings and roles. In musical contexts, artists often exploit this symbolic potential to reflect, reinforce, or subvert prevailing norms, making music a fertile site for sociolinguistic investigation.

In the African context, music plays a historical role in shaping cultural identity, preserving oral traditions, and mediating social dynamics. Musical genres such as Afrobeat, Highlife, and Taarab serve as repositories of communal memory and forums for public dialogue (Agawu, 2003). Through their lyrical content and performative style, African songs often engage with themes of governance, morality, gender, and resistance, thereby operating as tools for discursive negotiation. Barber (1997) underscores the centrality of popular art in African modernity, asserting that music often operates at the intersection of the personal and the political. In East Africa, music has evolved into a platform for the articulation of collective and individual experiences. From Bongo Flava in Tanzania to Genge in Kenya, East African music frequently addresses social realities such as urban struggles, love, unemployment, and gender roles (Perullo, 2005). These realities provide artists with linguistic resources and symbolic strategies to challenge or conform to social expectations. Language use in these musical forms reflects deep-seated cultural values and attitudes, thereby offering a rich source for sociolinguistic analysis. As such, musical discourse is increasingly recognised as a form of sociolinguistic storytelling (Pennycook, 2007).

Taarab Music as a Discursive Genre

Taarab music, in particular, is one of the most enduring and popular forms of entertainment in Tanzania. It is based on the Swahili cultural and poetic tradition and represents a fusion of sung Swahili poetry with Arab-influenced melodies, historically emerging along the East African coast (Khamis, 2004). Scholars agree that Taarab was introduced from the Middle East in the early 1900s (Chacha & Habwe, 2023; Khamis, 2004, 2011). It evolved by adopting local aesthetics and expanding inland to regions such as Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi, where it assumed new roles and cultural meanings (Khamis, 2004). As a discursive genre, Taarab has long been employed to convey messages of advice, criticism, praise, and satire, often in poetic and metaphor-laden language.

In the 1990s, a sub-genre known as *Mipasho Taarab* emerged in response to changes in communication technologies and sociopolitical liberalisation. Mipasho distinguishes itself from classical Taarab through its use of direct, unfiltered language that thrives on openness, sexual innuendo, insult, and provocation (Khamis, 2004; Mosoti, 2012). The term derives from the verb *-pasha*, meaning “to cause to get,” with the implication in this context being to deliver verbal abuse or shame (Khamis, 2004:40). As a lyrical form, Mipasho is characterised by hyperbole, sensationalism, and rivalry, particularly among female performers who compete through pointed verses often directed at real-life individuals. While men may dominate composition, women are central as consumers, poets, and innovators (Khamis, 2004; Beez & Kolbusa, 2003), actively participating in a genre where personal conflicts become stylised performances for public consumption.

Beyond entertainment, *Mipasho Taarab* serves as a sociocultural arena for expressing and negotiating gender identities and power relations. According to Mosoti (2012), *Mipasho* lyrics frequently contain fabricated personal histories and insults intended to attack rivals in love, social standing, or morality. These texts reflect not only individual feuds but also broader societal views on gender, relationships, and morality, often portraying how men view women and how women perceive themselves (Mlacha, 1996). The bluntness and specificity of *Mipasho* lyrics leave little room for ambiguity, making them powerful tools for public commentary. Despite its popular framing as amusing or vulgar, *Mipasho* functions as a performative

space where linguistic creativity is used to reproduce, resist, or reconfigure existing gender dynamics, aligning it with critical discursive practices in contemporary Swahili society.

Gender and Language in Popular Culture

Gender is a social construct performed and reinforced through language. Rather than being passively assigned, individuals actively shape their gender identities through everyday interaction (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This view transcends static definitions of gender as fixed traits and instead emphasizes performance and practice. Sociolinguistic research shows that language both reflects and challenges gender hierarchies through strategies such as politeness, metaphor, and narrative roles (Cameron, 2003; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2008). In music, female performers often use language to assert agency and resist patriarchy. West and Zimmerman's (1987) notion of "doing gender" aligns with the performative nature of *Mipasho* Taarab, a confrontational subgenre that dramatizes gender conflicts. Using metaphor, irony, praise, and insult, performers navigate power dynamics in romance and marriage. As Askew (2002) observes, *Mipasho* enables "emotional warfare," positioning women as both subjects and challengers of societal expectations. Through its lyrical discourse, *Mipasho* becomes a site for constructing and contesting femininity, masculinity, and morality.

This paper investigates the Mipasho Taarab song *Utalijua Jiji* by East African Melody to explore how women perceive themselves within gendered social frameworks. Rich in rhetorical and symbolic language, the song communicates themes of moral judgment, social hierarchy, betrayal, and female empowerment, making it a compelling site for sociolinguistic analysis. Given the cultural significance of *Mipasho* Taarab, there is a need for scholarly attention to how its language constructs and contests gendered identities. Most existing studies emphasize the genre's historical or aesthetic aspects (Askew, 2002) but neglect the critical discourse strategies female performers use to assert agency and challenge patriarchal norms. This study, therefore, fills that gap by offering a critical discourse analysis of *Utalijua Jiji* to examine how gendered identities are performed, resisted, and negotiated through language. The study specifically pursues two objectives: (1) to analyse the discursive strategies used in *Utalijua Jiji* for constructing and contesting gendered identities, and (2) to examine how the linguistic choices in the song reflect broader sociocultural ideologies related to gender in contemporary Tanzanian society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which perceives language as a social practice that reflects and reproduces power, ideology, and inequality (Fairclough, 1995). Drawing on Fairclough's three-level model *(textual, discursive,* and *sociocultural*), the analysis examines how *Utalijua Jiji* constructs gender through metaphor, lexical antithesis, modality, and intertextuality. CDA examines who assigns gendered attributes, how they are imposed, and how individuals respond, noting that such traits shift across time, religion, race, ethnicity, and class (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Further, CDA resonates with the performative and confrontational nature of *Mipasho* Taarab, where language serves as a tool for negotiating female agency and moral authority. In this study, CDA functions not merely as a method but as a critical lens for interpreting how *Utalijua Jiji* encodes social power and gender ideologies. The iterative movement between textual details and sociocultural context reveals how the song both reflects and contests dominant gender discourses.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach and discourse analysis design. *Utalijua Jiji* song was purposively selected due to its explicit gendered discourse, in accordance with the principles of purposive sampling in qualitative research. The lyrics were transcribed and translated before analysis. The study applied Fairclough's (1995) framework of experiential, relational, and expressive values to examine how language reflects social identities, relations, and evaluations. The framework facilitated a critical reading of how lexical and structural choices in the song reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies.

Analysis and Results

This study aims to investigate the construction, contestation, and communication of gendered identities in the Swahili *Mipasho Taarabu* song *Utalijua Jiji*, employing a critical discourse analysis approach. The

analysis investigates the intersection of language, power, and gender by focusing on the discursive and linguistic strategies embedded in the song's performance. As a genre, *Mipasho* is characterised by its direct, confrontational, and symbolic messaging, often performed by women to articulate social critique, rivalry, or moral positioning. This section presents the findings organised around the study's two objectives, drawing on rich linguistic data and relevant scholarly frameworks to elucidate how the song functions as a gendered cultural text.

Discursive Strategies in *Utalijua Jiji*

The first objective of the study was to analyse the discursive strategies used in *Utalijua Jiji* to construct and contest gendered identities. It emphasises how these strategies reflect and negotiate culturally embedded gender norms.

Polarisation

Polarisation is a discursive strategy that constructs opposing identities (*Us versus Them*) to reinforce social or ideological divides (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). It serves to justify symbolic dominance by associating the in-group with virtue and the out-group with failure (Fairclough, 1995). In gendered discourse, it enforces norms by shaming those who deviate (Lazar, 2005; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In the song "*Utalijua Jiji*," the singer employs this strategy to position herself as the ideal woman while portraying her rival as inadequate through contrasts in behaviour, morality, skills, and social standing. The following examples illustrate this:

1. *Nimepewa lugha tamu, nyoka hutoka pangoni*
   *'*I have been given a sweet tongue, enough to charm a snake out.'
2. *Wewe mkaanga sumu kwako hazipatikani*
   'You, the trouble monger—don't have any of these.'
3. *Mwenzangu huna ujuzi, mpenzi umemuudhi*
   'You lack skills, you've offended your lover.'
4. *Mimi naletewa ndani, wewe watanga na njia*
   'I get provided at home—you wander the streets.'
5. *Umeachika ndoani kwa yako mbaya tabia*
   'You got divorced because of your bad manners.'
6. *Nampikia maandazi, chai na tangawizi we mwenzangu*
   'I cook him doughnuts and ginger tea, my friend.'
7. *Unaogea jikoni, bafuni unapikia*
   'You bathe in the kitchen and cook in the bathroom.'
8. *Ngebe na jeuri zako, leo zimekuishia we mwenzangu*
   'Your insolence and arrogance have run out today, my friend.'

From examples (1–8) above, the singer constructs superiority through discursive *polarisation*. She begins with positive self-presentation, aligning herself with such words as *nidhamu* 'discipline', *utulivu* 'peace', and *ukarimu* 'hospitality' in lines 1 and 6. Her assertion that she is a good cook reflects the ideal of a homemaker *mwanamke wa nyumbani* 'housewife'. Meanwhile, she presents the rival as deviant in line 2, referring to her as a *mkaanga sumu* 'the trouble monger,' and *kitimutimu* in line 3 implies chaotic, worthless cooking. In line 4, she contrasts her own domestic privacy and dependence, *naletewa ndani* 'I am provided at home' with the rival's public roaming *watanga na njia* 'wanders the streets'. In line 5, she cites the rival's divorce and *mbaya tabia* 'bad behaviour'. Lines 3 and 6 construct a contrast between the singer's competence and the rival's perceived incompetence. Furthermore, in line 7, the performer mocks the rival's naivety, as in the line *Unaogea jikoni, bafuni unapikia* 'you bathe in the kitchen, cook in the bathroom.' Line 8 adds moral ridicule through *ngebe* 'insolence' and *jeuri* 'arrogance.'

Lexical Antithesis

The data reveal the use of lexical antithesis, whereby contrasting words are paired to emphasize differences and judgements. This stylistic device reinforces the binary oppositions central to gender ideology, such as *good vs. bad women* or *domestic vs. wild traits* (Wales, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). In gendered

discourse, such contrasts contribute to the encoding of social hierarchies and expectations. The following examples illustrate this:

9. *Kapenda yangu nidhamu, na utulivu nyumbani* vs. *Ngebe na jeuri zako, leo zimekuishia*
'He loves my discipline and the peace at home.' 'Your insolence and arrogance have ended today.'
10. *Baraka ya ukaidi, ukali kama embe gwawa* vs. *Ucheshi na tabasamu, kanijalia manani*
'Blessed with pride, you're as sour as an unripe mango.' 'My cheer and smile, the Almighty has gifted me.'
11. *Mimi naletewa ndani* vs. *Wewe watanga na njia*
'I'm provided for at home.' 'You roam the streets.'
12. *Kwangu kaweka makazi* vs. *Umeachika ndoani*
'I take my rightful place.' 'You've been divorced.'
13. *Chanchandu vitamutamu, wala hukumpatia* vs. *Nikampa vitu adimu, kwako hajavionea*
'Chutney and sweet things, you gave him none.' 'I gave him rare treats he never saw with you.'

From the examples provided, gendered identities are constructed through lexical antithesis that aligns the protagonist with culturally celebrated traits while negatively feminising the rival. In line 9, contrasts such as *nidhamu* 'discipline' versus *jeuri* 'arrogance', and *utulivu* 'calmness' versus *ngebe* 'insolence', reflect moral binaries. Similarly, line 10 reinforces domestic virtue by contrasting the nurturing act of being polite and with the rival's harshness. In line 11, spatial opposition—*naletewa ndani* 'being provided at home' versus *watanga na njia* 'roaming the streets'—associates the domestic space with virtue and public roaming with shame. Furthermore, in line 13, the protagonist declares mastery of caring for the husband against the rival's failure of caring for her husband.

Shame and Surveillance

Shame and surveillance are fundamental tools for regulating women's behaviour in patriarchal societies. As Foucault (1977) observes, power operates through internalised visibility, wherein individuals adjust their behaviour under the perception of being observed. In such contexts, women often regulate one another through gossip, ridicule, and moral judgement (Lazar, 2005; Mahmood, 2005). In *Utalijua Jiji*, this regulation becomes public and performative. The song functions as a platform through which the rival is publicly shamed before a moral community. The following examples illustrate how metaphor, insult, and ridicule are employed to enforce gendered norms.

14. *Umeachika ndoani, kwa yako mbaya tabia*
'You got divorced because of your bad manners.'
15. *Wewe gumzo mjini, watu wanahadithia*
'You're the city's gossip; everyone talks about you.'
16. *Wasela wa vijiweni, nafuu wajipatia, uroda kwa foleni, kwako wajipendelea*
'Street boys queue up to get cheap sexual service from you.'
17. *Kwako kaachia ngazi, kwangu kaweka makazi*
'He left your home and settled in mine.'
18. *Unaningoja njiani, madhila kunifanyia*
'You wait for me in the street to harass me.'
19. *Utamaliza mizizi, waganga na wagaguzi, talasimu na hirizi, ongeza na vipodozi*
'You'll finish all the roots, healers, and diviners, talismans, charms, and makeup.'
20. *Wewe mkaanga sumu, kwako hazipatikani*
'You, trouble monger—none of these virtues is found in you.'
21. *Na mapishi yako bomu, kitimutimu jikoni*
'Your cooking is a disaster, chaos in the kitchen.'

22. *Bwana imemuishia hamu, kakutimua nyumbani*
'The man lost interest and kicked you out.'

From the lines 14-22 above, it is demonstrated how shame functions both as punishment for non-conformity and as a performance of power among women competing for male approval. Line 14, *Umeachika ndoani, kwa yako mbaya tabia* 'You got divorced because of your bad manners', links failed marriage to moral defect. Line 15, *Wewe gumzo mjini, watu wanahadithia* 'You're the city's gossip, everyone talks about you', directly attacks the rival. The use of the words 'gossip' and 'city' evokes a scale of shame, positioning the rival's deviance not just as a personal flaw, but as a public, communal spectacle. Line 16, *Wasela wa vijiweni, nafuu wajipatia, uroda kwa foleni, kwako wajipendelea* "Street boys queue up to get cheap sexual service from you", performs sexual shaming by portraying the rival as commodified and promiscuous. In line 17, *Kwako kaachia ngazi, kwangu kaweka makazi*, 'He left your home and settled in mine.' Spatial movement symbolises the withdrawal of male validation. Similarly, line 18, *Unaningoja njiani, madhila kunifanyia* 'You wait for me in the street to harass me', recasts the rival as morally deviant while the singer claims victimhood, reinforcing moral surveillance through symbolic exclusion.

Line 19, *Utamaliza mizizi, waganga na wagaguzi talasimu na hirizi, ongeza na vipodozi* 'You'll finish all the roots, healers, and diviners' talismans, charms, and makeup" (still it won't help), mocks spiritual and cosmetic manipulation, portraying the rival as desperate and unnatural. Line 20, *Wewe mkaanga sumu, kwako hazipatikani* 'You, trouble monger—none of these virtues are found in you', depicts the rival as morally toxic, using kitchen imagery as a metaphor for failed womanhood. Line 21, *Na mapishi yako bomu, kitimutimu jikoni* 'Your cooking is a disaster, chaos in the kitchen', links culinary failure to feminine inadequacy. Lastly, Line 22, *Bwana imemuishia hamu, kakutimua nyumbani* 'The man lost interest and kicked you out', signifies total rejection, a loss of identity and respect.

Appropriation of Masculine Authority

The appropriation of masculine authority is a strategy whereby a female singer validates her identity by invoking male approval, desire, or choice. In patriarchal contexts, men are perceived as gatekeepers of legitimacy and power; consequently, women often assert superiority over rivals by aligning themselves with male endorsement. In *Mipasho Taarab*, this tactic is prevalent in performances that centre on male attention and respectability. Rather than challenging patriarchy, it frequently reinforces it, as gender is performed within dominant norms (Butler, 1997). The following lines from the song exemplify this rhetorical strategy.

23. *Kaja nimempokea, kaja kwangu nimempokea*
'He came, and I received him—he came to me and I welcomed him.'
24. *Bwana akapata wazimu, kashindwa kuvumilia*
'The man went crazy—he couldn't bear it anymore.'
25. *Kwangu akatia timu, tiba nikampatia*
'He came to me—and I gave him treatment.'
26. *Amri akasalimu, magoti kunipigia*
'He surrendered—knelt before me.'
27. *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi*
'The man gave me a chance to show him my skills.'
28. *Kwako kaachia ngazi, kwangu kaweka makazi*
He left you and settled with me.'

These lyrics suggest that the female singer constructs her authority and identity as an ideal woman through male validation and choice, appropriating masculine authority as a legitimising force rather than rejecting it. For instance, line 23, the line *kaja kwangu nimempokea* 'he came to me, I received him', positions the singer as the rightful recipient of male affection, demonstrating that her identity is validated through male recognition. Similarly, line 25, the line *Kwangu akatia timu, tiba nikampatia* 'he came to me, I gave him treatment', portrays the singer as a healer and redeemer, reinforcing traditional female caregiving roles sanctioned by patriarchal norms. Furthermore, example 27, *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi* 'the man gave me a chance to show my skills', illustrates how the woman's talents gain visibility only through

male permission. In line 26, *Amri akasalimu, magoti kunipigia* 'he surrendered and knelt before me', religious and royal symbolism underscore the theatrical nature of her power, dependent on male submission. Additionally, the song employs metaphors of migration, employment, and marital mobility to emphasise the woman's elevated status, always anchored in male agency. Line 24, *Bwana akapata wazimu…* 'the man went crazy…', frames the man's emotional collapse as a consequence of the rival's failure and the singer's moral restoration, positioning her as the preferred caregiver. In line 28, *Kwako kaachia ngazi, kwangu kaweka makazi* 'he left you and settled with me', professional discourse is metaphorically used to signify romantic promotion.

Linguistic Choices and Gender Ideology

The second objective was to examine how the linguistic choices in *Utalijua Jiji* reflect broader sociocultural ideologies related to gender in contemporary Tanzanian society. It has been observed that the language of the song reinforces dominant gender norms by contrasting the ideal, disciplined woman with a morally deviant, urbanised rival. Through metaphor, contrast, and moral judgement, it illustrates how Tanzanian discourse frequently associates femininity with domesticity, obedience, and male approval, positioning language as a means of regulating gendered behaviour.

Ideology of Ideal Womanhood: The Domesticated Self

The ideology of ideal womanhood in Tanzania characterises a "good" woman as domestic, submissive, nurturing, and morally upright, serving to regulate female behaviour in male-dominated societies (Meena, 1992; Swantz, 1985; Tripp, 1997). In *Utalijua Jiji*, this ideology is manifested through self-praise and shaming. The singer emphasises her domestic virtues while mocking her rival's shortcomings. The song's language, cooking metaphors, and moral judgments position the singer as the "ideal woman," thereby legitimising her claim to the man, as illustrated in the following examples.

29. *Kapenda yangu nidhamu, na utulivu nyumbani*
    *'*He loves my discipline and the peace at home.'
30. *Nampikia maandazi, chai na tangawizi*
    'I cook him doughnuts and ginger tea.'
31. *Kisha natoa dozi, impayo usingizi*
    'Then I make love that brings him sleep.'
32. *Nimepewa lugha tamu, nyoka hutoka pangoni*
    'I have sweet language—enough to draw snakes from their holes.'
33. *Pamoja na ukarimu, kwangu na majirani*
    'Along with kindness—to him and the neighbors.'
34. *Mwenzangu huna ujuzi, mpenzi umemuudhi*
    'You lack skill, you've angered your lover.'
35. *Na mapishi yako bomu, kitimutimu jikoni*
    'Your cooking is terrible—a mess in the kitchen.'
36. *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi*
    *'*The man gave me a chance to show my skills.'

The data indicate that the singer's identity is shaped primarily through domestic competence, particularly in emotional caregiving and culinary skills. For instance, line 29 *Kapenda yangu nidhamu, na utulivu nyumbani* 'He loves my discipline and the peace at home' highlights discipline and peace as valued feminine traits. In line 30 *Nampikia maandazi, chai na tangawizi* 'I cook him doughnuts and ginger tea', cooking symbolises intimacy and nurturing beyond mere nourishment. This caregiving role is further deepened in line 31 *Kisha natoa dozi, impayo usingizi* 'Then I give him a dose that brings him sleep', where the singer metaphorically acts as a healer, soothing the man emotionally and physically. This ideology is linguistically reinforced through metaphor and social responsibility. Line 32 *Nimepewa lugha tamu, nyoka hutoka pangoni* 'I have sweet language—enough to draw snakes from their holes' equates feminine gentleness with persuasive power. Line 33 *Pamoja na ukarimu, kwangu na majirani* 'Along with kindness—to him and the neighbours' extends this ideal to communal relations, demonstrating that womanhood is also measured by her ability to maintain peace beyond the home. Conversely, the rival's incompetence is discursively constructed as disqualifying. In line 34 *Mwenzangu huna ujuzi, mpenzi umemuudhi* 'You lack

skill, you've angered your lover' and line 35 *Na mapishi yako bomu, kitimutimu jikoni 'Your cooking is terrible—a mess in the* kitchen', failure in domestic skills symbolises moral failure. Finally, line 36 *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi* 'The man gave me a chance to show my skills' illustrates that male approval depends on the woman's ability to perform idealised femininity.

Language as a Moral Index

The concept of language as a moral index emphasises the role of linguistic choices in reflecting, communicating, and reinforcing a community's moral values, social norms, and ethical judgements. Language transcends the mere conveyance of facts or emotions; it also communicates evaluations of right and wrong, good and bad, and acceptable and deviant behaviour. Singers utilise word choice, metaphor, tone, and style to indicate approval or disapproval, thereby shaping moral identities (Fairclough, 1995). In gendered discourse, language serves as a mechanism for enforcing social norms by regulating behaviour and defining acceptable roles, virtues, and vices (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Consequently, linguistic expressions function as a moral index, revealing the underlying values and ideologies of society. The following examples from song lyrics illustrate these points clearly.

37. *Kazi yako ufisadi, jeuri, ngebe na nongwa*
    'You're specialized in corruption, arrogance, insolence, and drama.'
38. *Ushamba umekuzidi, andazi wanywea togwa*
    'Your backwardness shows—you drink porridge with doughnuts.'
39. *Wewe mkaanga sumu kwako hazipatikani*
    'You, the trouble monger—don't have any of these.'
40. *Kitimutimu jikoni*
    'A mess in the kitchen.'
41. *Umeachika ndoani, kwa yako mbaya tabia*
    'You got divorced because of your bad manners.'
42. *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi mwenzangu*
    'The man gave me a chance to show my skills.'
43. *Najinafasi, najinafasi*
    'I've taken over, I've claimed my space.'

From the examples above, it is evident that language in *Utalijua Jiji* operates as a powerful moral index, embedding ethical judgments that reinforce social norms and marginalise deviance. Line 37 employs the negative terms *ufisadi* 'corruption' and *jeuri* 'arrogance' to transcend personality flaws and depict the rival woman as morally degenerate. In Line 38, the use of *ushamba* 'backwardness' and the mocking imagery of eating *mandazi na uji* 'doughnuts with porridge' presents the rival as culturally incompetent, paralleling moral rejection with poor taste and social awkwardness Lines 39 and 40 reinforce this moral framing through metaphor: calling the rival *mkaanga sumu* 'trouble monger' symbolically casts her as dangerous even in domestic roles, while *kitimutimu* 'chaotic mess' portrays her kitchen—and by extension, her femininity—as a site of failure. Line 41 further extends this moral discourse by attributing the rival's divorce to *mbaya tabia* 'bad manners', illustrating how language links personal failings to social consequences, as Cameron (2007) argues in her analysis of language as a tool of social regulation. In contrast, the singer constructs her own identity through morally elevating language. In line 42, *nimuonyeshe ujuzi* 'show skills' reflects competence and desirability, while line 43's *najinafasi* 'I have claimed my space' signifies earned respect and belonging.

Urban Modernity as Female Deviance

In *Utalijua Jiji,* urban modernity is framed as female deviance when women's presence in public spaces and their adoption of modern lifestyles challenge patriarchal norms. In postcolonial African societies, the urban woman associated with mobility, fashion, and independence is frequently perceived as a threat to traditional gender roles (Tripp, 1997; Swantz, 1985; Tamale, 2000). Consequently, urban space emerges as a symbolic site where anxieties surrounding gender, power, and sexuality are projected. The following examples reflect this portrayal.

44. *Unaningoja njiani, madhila kunifanyia*
'You wait for me in the streets, to cause me trouble.'
45. *Wewe watanga na njia*
'You wander the streets.'
46. *Magomeni Buguruni, ndala zakukatikia*
'In Magomeni and Buguruni, your sandals are wearing out.'
47. *Wasela wa vijiweni, nafuu wajipatia*
'Street boys find relief in you.'
48. *Uroda kwa foleni, kwako wajipendelea*
'Even sex is by queue—with you they feel privileged.'
49. *Talasimu na hirizi, ongeza na vipodozi*
'You use charms and spells, plus cosmetics.'
50. *Ngebe na jeuri zako, leo zimekuishia*
'Your insolence and arrogance have come to an end.'
51. *Umeachika ndoani kwa yako mbaya tabia*
'You've been divorced because of your bad character.'
52. *Unaogea jikoni, bafuni unapikia*
'You bathe in the kitchen and cook in the bathroom.'

The extracts demonstrate that urban space is constructed as a site of female deviance, linking women's public visibility to shame, promiscuity, and moral decay. In line 44 *Unaningoja njiani, madhila kunifanyia* 'You wait for me in the streets, to cause me trouble' and line 45 *Wewe watanga na njia* 'You wander the streets', the rival is portrayed as loitering and confrontational in public, drawing from Tanzanian urban discourse that associates such visibility with idleness or moral looseness. Line 46 *Magomeni Buguruni, ndala zakukatikia* 'In Magomeni and Buguruni, your sandals are wearing out' reinforces this image by situating the rival in socially stigmatized neighbourhoods, where worn-out sandals symbolise unstable, purposeless mobility and poverty. These portrayals reflect Tripp's (1997) argument that patriarchal urban ideologies often interpret female independence as a challenge to male authority over sexual and economic spheres. Further, line 47 *Wasela wa vijiweni, nafuu wajipatia* 'Street boys find relief in you' and 48 *Uroda kwa foleni, kwako wajipendelea* 'Queue for sex, from you they enjoy themselves resent the rival as hyper accessible and sexually available. In line 49 *Talasimu na hirizi, ongeza na vipodozi* 'You use charms and spells, plus cosmetics', the rival's beauty practices are equated with witchcraft, reflecting historical anxieties over female sexual power.

The song's ideological messaging expands in lines 50 to 52, which function as moral judgments against women who challenge gender norms. Line 50 *Ngebe na jeuri zako, leo zimekuishia* 'Your insolence and arrogance have come to an end' targets bold speech and assertiveness, marking them as unacceptable traits for women. In line 51 *Umeachika ndoani kwa yako mbaya tabia* 'You've been divorced because of your bad character', marital breakdown is blamed solely on the woman, illustrating what Arnfred (2004) identifies as female-centred blame in African marriage discourse. Line 52 *Unaogea jikoni, bafuni unapikia* 'You bathe in the kitchen and cook in the bathroom' uses laughable inversion to ridicule the rival's domestic failure, symbolising a collapse of moral and spatial order. These depictions reflect broader patterns in African popular culture where women who defy traditional roles are publicly shamed or pathologised (Tamale, 2000; Perullo, 2005; White, 1990). Ultimately, *Utalijua Jiji* operates not just as entertainment but as an ideological apparatus that reinforces patriarchal control, teaching that female modernity, embodied in public presence, sexual agency, and independence, is threatening and must be disciplined.

Love and Power (Male as Judge, Woman as Performer)

The data analysed indicate that love and power intersect through gendered performance within patriarchal systems. Men serve as judges, while women are expected to fulfil roles associated with domesticity, submission, and emotional labour (Butler, 1990; Gill, 2007; Lazar, 2005). In urban Tanzanian Swahili culture, a woman's romantic worth is assessed by her ability to meet a man's emotional, sexual, and social needs. Love functions as a reward for obedience and a punishment for defiance. Consequently, men are not merely lovers; they act as gatekeepers of status and legitimacy in relationships (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Tripp, 1997). In *Utalijua Jiji*, this power dynamic is reinforced through poetic language and

Mipasho Taarab performance. As illustrated in the following examples (53-62), although the male figure remains silent, he embodies control—offering or withholding affection based on each woman's behaviour.

53. *Bwana kanipa nafasi, nimuonyeshe ujuzi*
'The man gave me a chance to show my skills.'
54. *Amri akasalimu, magoti kunipigia*
'He surrendered, kneeling before me.'
55. *Kwangu akatia timu, tiba nikampatia*
'He came to me—I gave him healing.'
56. *Kapenda yangu nidhamu, na utulivu nyumbani*
'He loves my discipline and peace at home.'
57. *Penzi ulimdhulumu, visa ukamfanyia*
'You starved him love—you gave him drama.'
58. *Mume ataka malezi, sio mambo ya kihuni*
'A husband wants care—not unruly behavior.'
59. *Bwana imemuishia hamu, kakutimua nyumbani*
'The man lost desire for you—he kicked you out.'
60. *Mimi sifanyi ajizi, mpenzi ninamuenzi*
'I do not delay—I honor my lover.'
61. *Nampikia maandazi, chai na tangawizi*
'I cook him doughnuts and ginger tea.'
62. *Huyo kwako harudi tena mwenzangu*
'He will never return to you, my friend.'

*F*rom the above extract, a consistent theme emerges in which male affection is conditional, granted only when a woman conforms to gendered expectations. The man acts as the ultimate judge of feminine worth, offering love as a reward for compliance rather than mutual emotional connection. For instance, line 53 *Bwana kanipa nafasi* 'The man gave me a chance' frames romantic approval as a privilege to be earned, reflecting patriarchal gatekeeping. In line 54 *Amri akasalimu, magoti kunipigia* 'He surrendered, kneeling before me', the man's symbolic surrender operates as a reward for the woman's idealised performance of obedience. In line 55 *Kwangu akatia timu, tiba nikampatia* 'He joined my team—I gave him healing', casting women as emotional caretakers. Line 56 *Kapenda yangu nidhamu, na utulivu nyumbani* 'He loves my discipline and peace at home' links feminine virtue to domestic tranquillity. In line 57 *Penzi ulimdhulumu, visa ukamfanyia* 'You starved him love, you gave him drama', the rival is framed as a deviant who fails to uphold ideal femininity.

This regulation of femininity is further reinforced through prescriptive gender roles. Line 58 *Mume ataka malezi, si mambo ya kihuni* 'A man wants care, not unruly behaviour' presents the ideal woman as nurturing and emotionally generous, while labelling resistance as *kihuni*, a term used to discipline deviant behaviour. Line 59 *Bwana imemuishia hamu, kakutimua nyumbani* 'The man lost desire for you—he kicked you out' shows love as a form of social exclusion when a woman fails to perform. Lines 60 and 61 'I honour him, I cook for him…' celebrate domestic acts like making doughnuts and ginger tea as ritual obligations securing male love. Finally, line 62 *Huyo kwako harudi tena mwenzangu* 'He won't return to you again' marks male decisions as final, emphasising male authority over relationship outcomes.

Discussion

This study investigates the construction and contestation of gendered identities in the *Mipasho Taarab* song *Utalijua Jiji*, with a focus on two objectives: (1) to analyse the discursive strategies employed to represent ideal and deviant femininities, and (2) to examine how linguistic choices within the song reflect gender ideologies. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, the study treats language as a site where power, identity, and ideology converge. Regarding the first objective, the analysis identifies four key strategies: *polarisation, lexical antithesis, shame and surveillance, and appropriation of masculine authority*, through which femininity is portrayed as a moral and relational performance that both reinforces and negotiates traditional gender norms.

Polarisation functions as a central discursive strategy through which the song constructs and legitimises competing forms of femininity. Rather than merely contrasting two women, the discourse establishes a moral binary that associates one woman with discipline, domesticity, respectability, and social order, while positioning the other as morally deficient, socially disruptive, and sexually suspect. These representations reflect what Lazar (2005) identifies as the tendency of patriarchal discourse to evaluate women according to their conformity to dominant moral and domestic ideals. Consistent with observations by Swantz (1985) and Meena (1992), feminine worth is discursively linked to obedience, caregiving, and commitment to the domestic sphere. Conversely, public visibility, mobility, and independence are represented as indicators of deviance, reinforcing Parpart's (2010) argument that women's presence in public spaces is often problematised within patriarchal social frameworks. The discourse also reproduces traditional gender relations by depicting women as dependent on male provision and validation, while positioning men as economic providers and arbiters of social legitimacy (Elias, 2018; Izumba & Keya, 2019). Through these contrasts, the singer constructs herself as the embodiment of the *mwanamke wa heshima* (respectable woman) and simultaneously casts her rival as a cautionary example of failed femininity. In doing so, she assumes the role of a moral regulator who polices the boundaries of acceptable womanhood. From a CDA perspective, this polarisation does more than describe social differences; it actively reproduces patriarchal ideologies by naturalising distinctions between "good" and "bad" women and presenting them as culturally legitimate and self-evident. Consequently, polarisation operates as an ideological mechanism through which femininity is categorised, monitored, and disciplined within prevailing Swahili gender norms. Lexical antithesis reinforces normative femininity through the systematic construction of binary oppositions that distinguish socially valued womanhood from its rejected counterpart. The discourse repeatedly contrasts attributes associated with discipline, domestic competence, and social respectability against those linked to arrogance, disorder, and moral inadequacy. These oppositional pairings are not merely stylistic devices but ideological mechanisms that naturalise particular gender expectations. As Lazar (2005) argues, gendered identities are often constructed through binary frameworks that privilege certain forms of femininity while marginalising others. Within the song, domestic competence emerges as a key marker of feminine worth, reflecting broader cultural beliefs that associate women with caregiving, household management, and relational harmony (Swantz, 1985; Shartiely, 2005). Similarly, social recognition and respectability are discursively tied to relational status and conformity to accepted gender norms, supporting Meena's (1992) and Ng'imba's (2022) observation that feminine legitimacy in many Tanzanian contexts is frequently derived from marital and domestic roles. The contrastive structure of the discourse, therefore, elevates the singer as the embodiment of ideal womanhood while constructing the rival as morally and socially deficient. In CDA terms, lexical antithesis functions as an ideological strategy that reproduces patriarchal gender hierarchies by presenting unequal evaluations of women as natural, self-evident, and culturally desirable. Through this process, the song constructs a moral economy of femininity in which value is assigned according to conformity to dominant gender expectations rather than individual autonomy.

The third strategy involves discourses of shame and surveillance, where the rival is subjected to ridicule and moral policing. These dynamics support Foucault's (1977) theory of internalised discipline and Goffman's (1967) notion of face management. The representation of divorce as a consequence of the rival's perceived misconduct serves to legitimise dominant gender ideologies that equate feminine respectability with successful marriage and moral conformity. Public humiliation continues to shame the rival's sexual accessibility, confirming Butler's (1990) claim that gender and sexuality are policed through cultural scripts. Through ridicule and exaggeration, the singer constructs the rival as a woman who unsuccessfully seeks validation through cosmetic enhancement and supernatural remedies. The critique extends beyond individual behaviour to reflect broader ideological assumptions about acceptable femininity. By portraying such practices as futile and undesirable, the discourse privileges traditional feminine virtues while delegitimising alternative expressions of female agency. In this way, the lyric contributes to the symbolic regulation of womanhood within a patriarchal social order. The lyrics reflect how the song functions as a public arena of feminine discipline, where moral failure is exposed and femininity is constantly surveilled and judged. Ngimba (2022) emphasises that woman-to-woman policing often promotes limiting narratives of women, something that makes women equally complicit in demeaning womanhood. Lazar (2005) further argues that this internalised surveillance becomes feminist critical discourse, where women enforce patriarchal norms upon each other. In the song, shame and surveillance operate as ideological tools, disciplining women to conform to cultural ideals of femininity, thereby transforming popular *Mipasho Taarabu* music into a site of gendered moral regulation.

The fourth finding reveals the appropriation of masculine authority as a discursive resource for constructing feminine legitimacy. Rather than resisting patriarchal power structures, the singer derives status and superiority through repeated references to male choice, recognition, and endorsement. The discourse consistently positions the male figure as the arbiter of value, whose approval validates the singer's identity and distinguishes her from the rival. Through narratives of acceptance, preference, and emotional dependence, the singer constructs herself as the rightful partner while simultaneously delegitimising the other woman. This representation aligns with Lazar's (2005) argument that feminine identities are often constituted through male recognition and approval. Moreover, the discourse frames feminine competence not as an autonomous attribute but as something acknowledged and rewarded by male authority. In this way, the song reproduces patriarchal gender relations by presenting male validation as the ultimate measure of female worth, thereby reinforcing rather than challenging existing structures of power. Fairclough (1995) emphasises that such language reproduces social hierarchies by embedding power in routine discourse. Butler (1990, 1997) also argues that gender is not innate but performatively constituted within power relations. Therefore, the lyrics confirm that in *Utalijua Jiji*, womanhood is not defined autonomously but through relational and performative acts of male-centred approval, affirming the persistence of patriarchal control over feminine identity. Additionally, this strategic appropriation of masculine power supports Fairclough's (1995) argument that discourse is a space for exercising and contesting power. The singer does not oppose patriarchal norms but performs them to gain social leverage. As Butler (1997) puts it, identity is constructed through repeated intelligible acts; here, these acts refer to those of male desire and preference. Lazar's (2005) critique of such performances as postfeminist masquerades is relevant, as the singer's agency remains confined within male-centred narratives. This mirrors Swantz's (1985) and Meena's (1992) insights that, in Tanzanian society, women earn respectability through men's recognition of their domestic roles. The singer masterfully enacts masculine authority not to dismantle patriarchy but to thrive within it by making it work in her favour.

The second objective examined how linguistic choices in Utalijua Jiji reflect and reproduce broader gender ideologies within Tanzanian society. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, language in the song does not merely describe social reality but actively participates in constructing, legitimising, and regulating particular understandings of womanhood. The discourse consistently associates feminine worth with domestic competence, moral respectability, and the ability to satisfy male expectations, while simultaneously marginalising alternative expressions of female identity. Through evaluative language, metaphor, contrast, and ridicule, the song constructs a hierarchy of femininities in which some forms of womanhood are celebrated and others are condemned.

A dominant ideological theme emerging from the analysis is the valorisation of domestic femininity. The singer repeatedly constructs caregiving, household management, and emotional labour as indicators of feminine virtue and social legitimacy. Domestic practices are not represented as ordinary activities but as symbolic resources through which women earn recognition, respect, and male affection. This finding supports Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (2003) argument that language encodes and reproduces gendered expectations through everyday discourse. Similarly, Mnenuka (2012) observes that attributes such as politeness, cleanliness, domestic competence, and sexual fulfilment are frequently portrayed in Swahili popular discourse as qualities that secure male approval and relationship stability. Within the song, these attributes function as moral capital through which the singer establishes her superiority over the rival. At the same time, the discourse constructs a counter-image of failed femininity through lexical choices associated with arrogance, disorder, gossip, and incompetence. Such representations extend beyond personal criticism and operate ideologically by portraying certain women as morally deficient and socially undesirable. Through this process, the song transforms behavioural differences into moral distinctions, naturalising the belief that women should conform to established gender norms for them to be valued. As Lazar (2005) argues, patriarchal discourse often legitimises unequal gender relations by presenting culturally specific expectations of femininity as common sense rather than ideological constructions.

The analysis further reveals how spatial language functions as a mechanism for regulating female behaviour. References to public spaces, mobility, and movement are repeatedly associated with moral decline, promiscuity, and social instability. Urban visibility is therefore constructed not as a sign of independence or agency but as evidence of deviance. These representations reflect wider patriarchal anxieties concerning women's presence in public spaces and their access to social and sexual autonomy. Perullo and Fenn (2003) similarly note that female sexuality frequently becomes a site of symbolic struggle in Swahili popular music, where competing notions of morality, respectability, and power are negotiated. Through these spatial representations, the discourse reinforces the ideological boundary between the respectable domestic woman and the morally suspect public woman.

Another significant ideological pattern concerns the moral regulation of femininity. The discourse ridicules the rival's reliance on cosmetics, charms, and other means of attracting attention or influence, portraying such practices as signs of desperation, manipulation, and moral inadequacy. While these representations reflect broader cultural tendencies to stigmatise women who depart from socially sanctioned models of femininity (White, 1990; McCurdy, 2006), the issue extends beyond a simple opposition between patriarchy and female freedom. The song constructs a moral framework in which acceptable womanhood is associated with discipline, responsibility, and relational commitment, while behaviours perceived as deceptive, exploitative, or socially disruptive are condemned. However, the discourse applies these moral expectations unevenly by evaluating female behaviour more intensely than male behaviour and by locating responsibility for relationship success or failure primarily in women. Consequently, the song does not merely promote moral values; it also reproduces gendered standards through which women are judged, classified, and disciplined. From a CDA perspective, the significance lies not in whether the criticised behaviours are morally acceptable or unacceptable, but in how the discourse applies moral judgment in a gendered way and uses it to regulate women.

Viewed through Fairclough's (1995) sociocultural dimension of discourse, these linguistic choices reveal the operation of broader patriarchal ideologies that organise social expectations of gender. The song not only reflects existing beliefs about womanhood but also participates in their reproduction by presenting domesticity, obedience, and male-centred respectability as desirable and natural. Consequently, Utalijua Jiji functions as more than a form of entertainment; it serves as an ideological text through which gender identities are evaluated, hierarchised, and disciplined. Through its discursive construction of ideal and deviant femininities, the song contributes to the maintenance of gendered power relations and the regulation of acceptable female behaviour within contemporary Swahili society.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *Utalijua Jiji, and Mipasho Taarab more broadly, functions as a significant discursive arena in which gender identities, s*ocial relations, and cultural values are negotiated, contested, and reproduced. Through the deployment of discursive strategies such as polarisation, lexical antithesis, shame and surveillance, and the appropriation of masculine authority, the song constructs a binary opposition between idealised and deviant femininities. These strategies do not merely describe women; rather, they categorise, evaluate, and regulate female behaviour in ways that reflect broader relations of power embedded within society.

The analysis further reveals that the song's linguistic choices are ideologically embedded, reflecting and reproducing dominant assumptions about femininity, morality, and gender relations within contemporary Tanzanian society. By associating feminine worth with domestic competence, moral respectability, and male approval, the discourse reproduces dominant gender norms while simultaneously marginalising women who fail to conform to these expectations. At the same time, the study highlights how moral judgments are unevenly distributed, with women subjected to intense scrutiny and accountability for relational success or failure. Consequently, the song serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a mechanism through which gendered identities are constructed, legitimised, and disciplined within contemporary Tanzanian culture.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce Fairclough's (1995) proposition that discourse is a form of social practice through which ideology and power are enacted and naturalised. The study further demonstrates the value of Critical Discourse Analysis in uncovering the subtle ways popular cultural texts participate in the maintenance of social hierarchies. By revealing how seemingly ordinary lyrical expressions encode assumptions about femininity, morality, and respectability, the analysis contributes to broader debates on language, gender, and power in African sociocultural contexts.

Ultimately, *Utalijua Jiji* illustrates that gender is not simply represented in discourse but actively produced through it. The song becomes a site where competing visions of womanhood are negotiated, where social boundaries are drawn, and where cultural expectations are reaffirmed or challenged. Understanding such processes is crucial because popular music does not merely reflect society; it also shapes the ways individuals understand themselves and others. Future research could extend this inquiry to other musical genres, such as Bongo Flava and contemporary Swahili poetry, while also incorporating audience reception and intersectional perspectives to examine how gender ideologies are interpreted, resisted, or transformed across diverse social contexts.

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Author Biography

Dr Loveluck Philip Muro is a Lecturer in the Department of Languages and Literature at Dar es Salaam University College of Education, University of Dar es Salaam. She holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Dar es Salaam. Her research focuses on semantics, African languages, language and education, as well as language and gender.