UMMA, Volume 12 (2), 2025: 115–137

Linguistic Forms and Strategies of Endearment among Kiswahili-Speaking Youths in Urban Tanzania

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Abstract

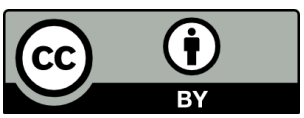
This study analysed the forms and functions of endearment among Kiswahili-speaking youths in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It focuses on four categories of linguistic endearments: address forms, evaluative remarks, erotic expressions, and positive pejoration, including solidarity markers. A total of 77 youths from Makongo and Saranga wards participated through snowball sampling. Data were collected via unstructured interviews and participant observation, capturing informal, dyadic interactions among peers. The findings reveal that Kiswahili provides a rich repertoire of linguistic resources for expressing affection, solidarity, and social identity. Address forms were the most frequently used, while erotic expressions and evaluative remarks were the most diverse. The study highlights that these endearment strategies are highly context-sensitive and reflect the speakers' interpersonal communicative competence, especially in informal basilectal settings. Theoretical insights from sociopragmatics, conceptual metaphor theory, and identity construction illuminate how these linguistic practices negotiate relationships, reinforce solidarity and construct social identity. Future studies could explore endearment in broader settings, in social media, and longitudinally to examine shifts in usage across age, gender, and social mobility. The study contributes to understanding Kiswahili as a flexible, socially and culturally rich medium for interpersonal connection.

Keywords:
Address forms, erotic expressions, evaluative remarks, Kiswahili, positive pejoration, solidarity markers, sociopragmatics, terms of endearment.

https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v12i2.6

Introduction

The linguistic category of endearments constitutes a fertile and highly productive domain of linguistic creativity. According to Grzasko (2015), it is nearly impossible to compile a comprehensive dictionary of lexical items used in an endearing sense, as speakers continually generate both conventional and nonce forms. While some



affectionate expressions, such as honey, sweetheart, darling, and love, appear frequently across English-speaking contexts, many other endearments are context-specific. They may never be documented in written sources. This lexical openness underscores the dynamic and socially embedded nature of affectionate language. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, endearment frequently draws upon metaphorical conceptualisations grounded in embodied experience. Kövecses (2006) demonstrates that both females and males are sometimes conceptualised metaphorically as foodstuffs, reflecting broader metaphors that associate love and affection with sweetness, desirability, and consumption. Similarly, Crystal (2014) notes the use of plant-based metaphors such as cabbage and pumpkin as attested terms of affection. These patterns reveal that endearment is not arbitrary but culturally structured, often relying on shared conceptual metaphors that encode intimacy, attractiveness, and emotional warmth.

In the context of this study, the terms of endearment are used in the sense proposed by Afful and Nartey (2013), referring to words or expressions employed in interactive, dyadic, and face-to-face situations by a speaker to address or describe a person for whom the speaker feels love or affection. Such expressions may also be called sweet words, affectionate talk, soft words, or terms of affection. Importantly, endearments extend beyond simple address forms and may include evaluative remarks, playful derogation, erotic expressions, and solidarity markers.

Empirical Studies

Empirical research on linguistic endearment has generally developed along three major thematic lines: address forms among homogeneous groups, address practices in native–foreigner interactions, and endearments in digital communication. First, address forms within relatively homogeneous settings, particularly educational institutions, have been widely examined. Wong and Leung (2004) analysed English address practices among Hong Kong undergraduate students, noting that students' choice of forms reflected identity orientations shaped by field of study, educational background, and peer influence. Kiesling (1998) examined the use of the address form 'dude' among American college students, demonstrating its role in maintaining fraternity and solidarity. Similarly, Afful (2006) analysed personal names, titles, descriptive

phrases, and catchphrases used in a Ghanaian university, showing how students strategically constructed, negotiated, or resisted identities. Afful and Nartey's (2013) study further demonstrated that students used varied terms of endearment to express intimacy, foster solidarity, and position their identities. Across these studies, terms of endearment—though diverse and context-dependent—serve dual functions: bonding and identity construction.

Second, some studies have examined endearment in intercultural and native–foreigner interactions. Skagerström (2009) explored how native speakers address foreigners and found notable gender-based differences in levels of formality. Levidze (2019) noted that verb forms of endearment in Georgian function as complex intercultural signs reflecting stereotypical views embedded within a linguistic community. Hwang (1991) compared Western and Oriental address systems, observing that the constituent order of addresses correlates with broader cultural orientations toward individualism or collectivism. These studies highlight that endearment practices are deeply intertwined with cultural ideologies, gender norms, and social hierarchies.

Third, recent research has examined endearment in digital communication. Febrianti and Al-Auwal (2020) analysed the use of terms of endearment in social media chats, showing that interlocutors employed multilingual and hybrid expressions to maintain closeness, align with trends, engage in humour, and reinforce relational bonds. This line of research underscores the evolving and adaptive nature of affectionate discourse in technologically mediated environments.

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, the literature reveals two significant limitations. First, most studies concentrate primarily on address forms, often neglecting other categories of linguistic endearment such as evaluative remarks, erotic expressions, solidarity markers, and positive pejoration. These forms, although central to everyday affectionate interaction, remain underexplored within a unified analytical framework. Second, none of the reviewed studies focuses on the Kiswahili-speaking speech community. Given Kiswahili's rich sociolinguistic diversity and its dynamic urban youth registers, particularly in Dar es Salaam, an examination of endearment strategies within this context is both timely

and necessary.

A study that integrates multiple forms of endearment within a Kiswahili-speaking speech community would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of affectionate discourse and illuminate how contextual factors shape the meaning and functions of language. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse the forms of endearment among Kiswahili-speaking community members in the Dar es Salaam Region, with particular attention to their pragmatic functions, social meanings, and role in identity construction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated sociolinguistic and pragmatic framework that explains youth endearment strategies as socially meaningful, interactionally performative, and identity-indexical linguistic practices. The framework draws primarily on Speech Act Theory, Politeness and Face Theory, Social Identity and Community of Practice theory, Theories of Language Play, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Together, these perspectives provide a multidimensional explanation of how endearment operates structurally, socially, and cognitively within urban Swahili-speaking youth communities.

At the core of the framework is Speech Act Theory, developed by John L. Austin (1962) and later refined by John Searle (1969). This theory posits that language is not merely descriptive but performative: speakers use utterances to accomplish actions such as expressing emotions, making commitments, reassuring others, or establishing relational alignment. From this perspective, endearment strategies are understood as illocutionary acts whose primary function is relational rather than propositional. Their meaning lies not only in literal semantic content but in the social action performed and the perlocutionary effect produced. This theoretical lens allows the study to conceptualise endearment as a pragmatic accomplishment that strengthens bonds, negotiates intimacy, and performs emotional positioning within peer relationships.

Complementing this perspective is Politeness Theory as advanced by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987). Their model of positive and negative face provides a useful account of how speakers manage relational needs in interaction. Youth endearment strategies are

particularly aligned with positive politeness, which emphasises solidarity, in-group membership, and the desire to be approved of and liked. Linguistic forms that might appear impolite in other contexts can function as markers of intimacy when shared norms and mutual trust are established. Within youth communities, the strategic manipulation of conventional politeness norms becomes an index of closeness rather than hostility. Thus, endearment strategies can be understood as face-enhancing devices that reinforce affiliation and reduce social distance.

The framework further incorporates Social Identity Theory, as proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), and the notion of communities of practice, as elaborated by Etienne Wenger (1998). These scholars treat Language as a key resource for constructing and negotiating social identities. Urban youth groups constitute communities of practice in which shared linguistic repertoires develop through sustained interaction. Endearment strategies, therefore, function as identity markers that signal group belonging, gender positioning, relational roles, and generational identity. Through repeated use in localised networks, these forms become socially meaningful signs that distinguish insiders from outsiders and informal peer interaction from formal communicative domains.

In addition, the study draws on theories of language play and verbal creativity as discussed by Ronald Carter and Michael McCarthy (2004). Language play involves the creative and strategic manipulation of linguistic resources for social effect. Within youth discourse, playful exaggeration, irony, and metaphorical innovation are central mechanisms for building intersubjectivity. Verbal play enhances amusement, diffuses tension, and strengthens relational ties. It also depends on shared background knowledge and mutual understanding, making it a powerful tool for reinforcing group cohesion.

Finally, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as articulated by Zoltán Kövecses (2006), informs the analysis of evaluative and affective language. Emotions and interpersonal relationships are frequently structured through metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied and cultural experience. Endearment strategies often rely on metaphorical conceptualisations that frame affection, intimacy, and solidarity in culturally resonant ways. This cognitive dimension highlights how linguistic creativity is anchored in

shared experiential schemas, allowing speakers to express complex emotional meanings through figurative language.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives conceptualise youth endearment strategies as performative speech acts (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), positive-politeness devices (Brown & Levinson 1987), identity-indexing practices (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Wenger 1998), playful linguistic innovations (Carter & McCarthy 2004), and metaphorically structured expressions of affect (Kövecses 2006). The framework thus situates endearment within a broader understanding of language as social action, cultural cognition, and identity construction in urban Tanzanian Swahili-speaking communities.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Ubungo municipality in Dar es Salaam region. It involved 77 youths chosen using snowball sampling. The youths were mainly from Saranga and Makongo Wards. The age range of the youths was between 18 and 23 years. Out of these, 42 were males, and 35 were females. Most (47, or 70.1%) were secondary school students, whereas five (7%) were university students, and the remaining 15 (22.3%) were post-secondary students or self-employed.

The study used an unstructured interview to elicit the words and phrases they used to endear themselves to their friends (both casual and intimate). The researcher also spent time as a silent observer in their interpersonal communications to enrich and triangulate the data. Eight visits were made to the informal youth stalls, popularly known as *vijiwe*, to observe language use, during which various forms of endearment were used. The researcher noted the endearment words, phrases, and sentences and tallied their frequencies of use. He also observed different forms of contextual cues, such as participants' kinesics and paralinguistic features, to aid in the correct interpretation of language use for endearing. In addition, he audio-recorded the conversations with participants' consent and later played back the recordings to identify forms of endearment that might have gone unnoticed during the note-taking. The findings were then summarised into themes.

Findings

The findings are organised into four themes: address forms, evaluative remarks, solidarity markers, and positive pejoration.

Address Forms

Address forms are used differently depending on the kind of group interactions involved in participants' discourse, as summarised in Figure 4.1:

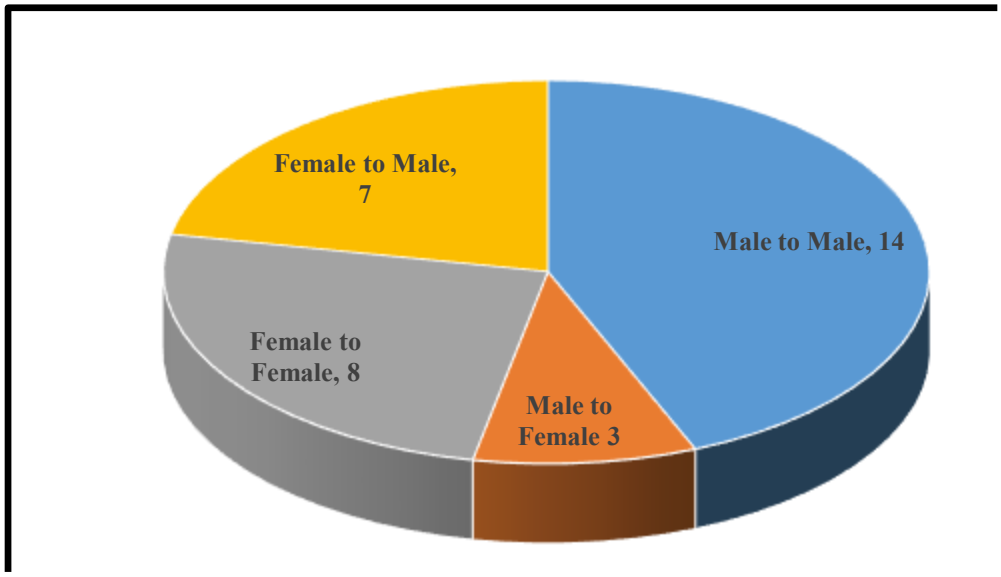


Figure 4.1 Forms of Endearing Address Forms

The data in Figure 4.1 show that there were 32 address forms of endearment distributed across four categories defined by the nature of group interactions in the talk exchange.

Male-to-male: This category of talk exchange involves only males talking to or about their male buddies in cementing friendships. The most dominant group is that of male to male respondents in which 14 (43.8%) endearment address forms were used. These are the use of familial terms;

mwana (son), *broo* (brother), *braza* (brother, but disguised form of English equivalent), and *jamaa angu/etu* (my/our pal); titles of sports nature, *bingwa* (champion); terms extended from slangs defining addresses' marital status*: e.g. msela* ('barchelor'), as well other slang coinages*: mshirika* (fellow guy), *jembe* ('literally 'hoe', but referring to strength and quality') and *mchizi* ('crazy person'). Generally, most terms in male-to-male endearments involve praise for achievements in what are considered male hobbies and terms of familial affiliation.

Female-to-female: This occurred when females spoke to or about their female friends. It ranks second with 8 (25%) address forms, namely: *shoga* ('close friend'), *shosti ('*sister', disguised form for 'sister'), *mpenzi* ('intimate friend'), and *mambo* ('how are the things'), *yaani we acha tu* ('You would rather not ask for explanations'*), mwenzako naumia* ('I, your pal, am hurting') and *rafiki yangu* ('my dear pal'). The data above imply that, unlike male-to-male endearment discourse, female-to-female endearment discourse is emotionally inclined and tends to use familial terms. This is typical of what's considered girlie talk.

Female-to-male: A talk exchange in which females talk to or about their partners, had 8 (21.8%) uses. Some of the expressions were related to sexual pleasure: *mkunaji* ('scratcher of my sensual organs'*),* others from personalization or ownership: *nambie wangu* ('tell me, my'), *mtu wangu* ('my man'), *mpenzi wangu* ('my beloved'), and from botanical terms like *waridi la moyo wangu* ('rose of my heart') and words borrowed from English*: my love* or adapted from English and used within Kiswahili strings*: bebi wangu mwenyewe ('*my and mine only babe'*)* and *dia wangu mwenyewe* ('my and mine only dear'). Mostly, the discourse above testifies to ladies' preference for belonging and wanting to singly 'own love' of their beloved male partners.

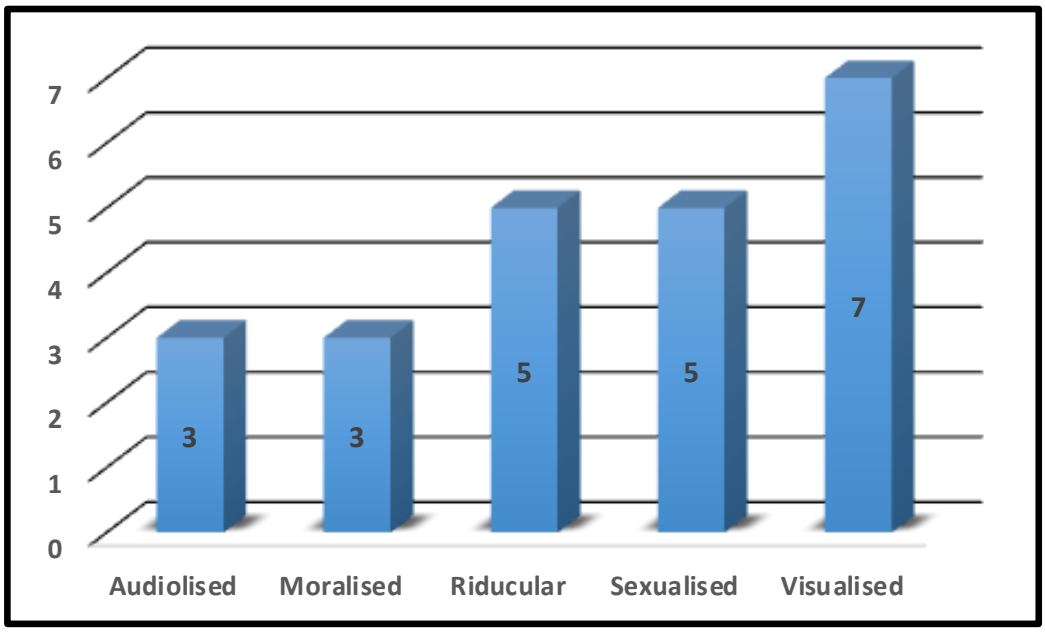
Male-to-female: This was the least used form of endearment talk, in which male respondents referred to women. The terms used were only three (9.4%), namely, *malkia, demu* and *manzi* (which are slang for 'queen', 'dame' and 'lady owned by a guy', respectively). The scantiness of terms in this category and the distal way of referring to females show how males are less erotic and 'business-like' in handling intimacy compared to females.

Artika (2008) opines that second addressing can be repeated constantly throughout a conversation to reinforce the relative intimacy and solidarity between people. Similarly, Asmawati's (2003) sociolinguistics analysis of the English address system used in the *Black Boy* novel revealed five kinds of address terms: addresses using a name, addresses using a respectful term, addresses using a family relationship term, addresses using a close relation term, and addresses using mockery.

Evaluative Remarks

Evaluative remarks are comments on the quality of a particular act.[1]. In this study, they are evaluative words and performances (verbal, visual, or sexual) spoken by one friend or partner to another to encourage, cement, or repair phatic bonding. In the current study, 23 evaluative remarks were gathered and classified into five categories: visualised, sexualised, ridiculing, moralising, and audiolised. The distribution is summarised in Figure 4.2

[1] https://everythingwhat.com/what-is-evaluative-comment, accessed on 28th December, 2022



The data in Figure 4.2 are highly illustrative of the diversity of endearing evaluative remarks and their differing frequencies.

Visualised expressions: The most dominant category, accounting for 30.4 % of the 23 terms. Examples are *umepotea kama miguu ya nyoka* ('you have been lost like a snake's legs'), *njaa haina baunsa* ('hunger spares no one, not even a bouncer') and *usiwe na haraka kama unaogea nje* ('Don't be hasty as though you are taking a bath outside') as well as such slangs as *Jamaa katema povu* ('The guy has spat much foamy saliva'), *kitu shavu* ('a thing as chubby as a chin') and *mshikaji katema cheche* ('our pal has spat sparks'). Most of these expressions evoke either mental images of motion or other haptics.

Sexualized expressions: Ranking second is the sexualized category, which refers to the use of language to make something sexual in character or quality or to become aware of sexuality[2], used in this study to elicit

[2] "Sexualization" (definition). Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved 30 September 2025.

laughter and thus cement friendship. This has five (21.7%) realisations. Examples are: *kiherehere kama bao la kwanza* ('as hasty as the ejaculation in the first round of sexual activity'), *mshika-pembe* ('the holder of horns') and *panua paja mti*[3] *waja* ('spread the thighs, the piece of wood is on its way'). These slangs are metaphors and similes which, if taken out of context, would be impolite, to say the least. However, as hinted earlier, they are ironically used to elicit amusement.

Ridiculing terms: Similarly, ridiculing endearing words which are also evaluative in nature appeared five (21.7%) times, as *msaada hauna risiti* ('a help requires no receipt'), *mzee wa kula kona* ('a dodgy elderly man'), *ngoma hailali* ('a dance sleeps not'), and *unakwea mnazi na msuli, unategemea nini?* ('What do you expect if you climb a coconut tree wearing a loose waistcloth?'). Most of these terms are corrective, as they dissuade the addressee from engaging in imprudent behaviour.

Moralising and audiolised endearing evaluative remarks are not as popular, with each accounting for three (13%) realisations. Moralising remarks are statements that are used to express beliefs about what is good behaviour and what is bad behaviour (*https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/moralize*). However, in the context of this study, the statements are used jovially to cement endearment while simultaneously meeting the communicative goal. These are*: samaki hasikii kiu (*'a fish does not go thirsty'), *tugombane sasa hivi tupatane badaye, najua hakuna wasiogombana* ('let us quarrel now, but later make peace; I know no pals live without occasional quarrels'*)* and *upendo hauwezi kununuliwa* ('love cannot be bought'). These discourses are more conciliatory, seeking to nurture the relationship jovially.

Generally, the evaluative remarks, taken literally, do not suggest endearment, but these were observed being used with the aim and perlocutionary effect of amusement.

[3] Mti is a slang expression for male sexual organ that is fully erect.

Erotic Expressions

These are expressions used for treating, maintaining or fuelling sensual love and expressing strong sexual desire.[4]. These expressions, unlike sexualised expressions as used above, have more positive and ameliorative inclinations: In the current study, 28 expressions were observed among people of different sexes when addressing one another and were classified into six social speech acts, as summarised in Figure 4.3.

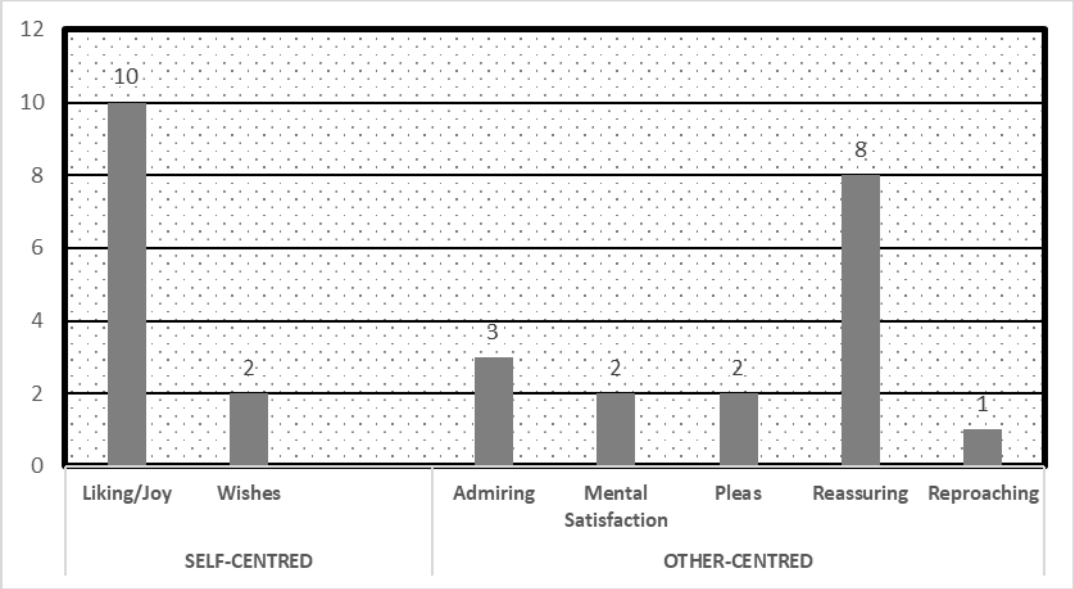


Figure 4.3: Distribution of Erotic Expressions to Express Endearment

Figure 4.3 shows that there are two categories of erotic expressions: self-centred and other-centred.

Self-centred category: This refers to expressive acts of liking or an outcry of joy. It is most prevalent as it occurs 10 (43.8%) times in all 8 speech situations, examples being *nakupenda sana mpenzi wangu* ('I love you so much my beloved'), *nikilala nakuota wewe* ('when I am asleep I dream of you)', *ninapokula nakuona juu ya kijiko* ('I see your image on my spoon as I

[4] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/erotic

dine'), *wewe ni wangu wa kufa na kuzikana* ('you are mine till death do us part'), *wewe ni usingizi wangu* ('you are the reason for my sleep') and *nitakufa juu yako* ('I will die for you'). The second category, self-centred speech acts, refers to wishes in which speakers express their desire for continued relationships. This appears only twice (8.7%) as *natamani tuishi hivi siku zote* ('How I wish we could live like this all days') and *upendo wako kwangu usichujuke* ('May your love to me never lose its newness'). Generally, these terms enshrine emotive commissive speech acts, assuring the addressee of their love commitments.

Other-centred category: This consists of the effect of the beloved's friendship on the speaker. This is comparably more diverse as it consists of 5 subcategories, namely;

i) ***Reassuring*****:** The most dominant (8 times, 34.7%) is reassuring, whereby the speaker shows their beloved their continued loving engagement in the form of nostalgic statements, e.g. *sura yako haifutiki akilini mwangu kirahisi ingawa upo mbali* ('your image does not easily fade from my memory though you are far from me'), and *nami penzi lako bado nalithamin*i ('I, on my part, still treasure your love'), rhetorical questions, e.g. *niseme nini ujue nakupenda?*('What can I say so you know I love you?'), *nifanye nini ujue nakupenda?* ('What can I do so you know I love you?') and *nikuite jina gani ujue ni wewe peke yako upo moyoni mwangu*? ('What name can I call you so you know you are the only one in my heart?') and commisive, e.g., *Mimi sitaki kuwa kila kitu kwa kila mtu, lakini napenda kuwa kitu kwa mtu, na mtu mwenyewe ni wewe* ('I don't want to be everything to everyone, but I love to be something to someone, and you are that someone') and *nafunga milango ya moyo wangu ili kutokupokea ugeni wowote wa moyo zaidi yako mpenz*i ('I shut all the doors of my heart to any foreign love in my heart except for you, my love'). These reassurances aim to foster the addressee's love by leveraging the charm of the expressions used.

ii) ***Admiring***: Ranking second in this category, and spoken by females to males, is the speech act of admiring, which occurs 3 (13%) times, as in *hakuna mwingine zaidi yako* ('There is no one but you (in my life'), *hakika kama ni mume Mungu kanipatia* ('Surely, for a husband, God-given me one'), and *kuwa nawe najiona kama malkia* ('I feel like a queen when I am with you'). These sentences show that when relationships grow

positively, the beneficiaries praise their partners' role in that growth.

iii) ***Mental Satisfaction:*** This is not as popular since mental satisfaction speech acts were only three (e.g. *wewe ni pete kidoleni kwangu* ('You are a ring on my finger') and *moyo wangu unajua kupenda katu haujui kutenda* ('My heart knows only to love and not to hurt'). These sentences show the speakers' high degree of satisfaction with the depth and growth of their loving relationships with their partners.

iv) ***Pleas:*** These appear only twice, namely *tafadhali usiniache* ('Do not leave me, please') and *usiniumize tafadhali* ('Do not hurt me, please'). These instances, tough as they are, indicate the tenderness and youthfulness of a relationship in which the partner pleads not to be hurt or left.

v) ***Reproaching (in a friendly way):*** This appears only once out of 28 erotic expressions, namely, *wewe, punguza spidi na huyo mtu wako, yatakushinda* ('You, try to slow down in your move for your man-to-be, else you might not succeed'). Exhortative language like this functions to warn someone to be less hasty in entering into committed relationships.

Rühlemann (2007) has observed that the address, like a vocative, often marks the entrance to an interactional event and marks out the interactional position or 'stance' of the speaker.

Solidarity markers

These are linguistic resources employed to cement and sustain togetherness. Fillmore (1975, cited in Levinson 1983) refers to these as social deixis, referring to aspects of language structure that encode the social identities of participants, the social relationship between them, or between one of them and persons and entities referred to. Hudson (2001) calls these "linguistic items that reflect social characteristics of the speaker, of the addressee or the relation between them" (p.12). In the current study, these are used seven times, as in *we na mimi damudamu* " (you and I are like blood relatives), *tupo pamoja* ('we are together in this'), *tusepe mshikaji* ('let's be going, pal'), *kimpango wetu* ('in our own secret plan'), *tukiwa wawili hatushindwi ('*when we are both united, we do not fail), and *lako ni langu* ('what is yours is also mine'). The majority of the data above function as emancipative speech acts by interlocutors who act together and conduct

their affairs jointly. In other words, language is used as a tool to solidify togetherness.

Elsewhere, Salifu (2010) explored the key linguistic components of Dagbanli address forms: kinship terms, names, titles, and the social and cultural values attached to them. He notes that these elements can be combined in different ways, not only to identify the addressee or referent, but also to communicate other social meanings and attitudes, such as politeness, power, and solidarity.

Positive pejoration

Positive pejoration, in the context of this study, refers to the speaker's use of otherwise pejorative expressions to communicate jokes and amusement as a way of endearment. Examples are the use of outright pejorative terms like *kichaa wangu huyu* ('my crazy pal, this one'), *fala huyu* ('this silly fellow'), *wewe huna hoja, una haja* ('you have no point, you only have shit') and *jamaa langu kichwa jeuri* ('this my pal is pig-headed'). Some are evaluative, like *acha kubwilambwila* ('stop stalling') and *mtoto akililia wembe ujue vuzi limeshaota* ('When a child is crying for a razor, she/he has grown puberty hair'); others are extortive e.g. *mwanaume hasifiwi kula anasifiwa shughuli* ('A man is not praised on how much he can eat but on how much he can perform the duty (in the marital bed)'), *kusoma kuelewa kukesha mbwembwe* ('studying is meant for understanding, keeping a vigil studying is mere showiness'), *hata msufi ulianza kama tembele* ('Even a wool tree had a humble beginning like vegitable'), *nyoka hana kiuno ndo mana havai shanga* ('a snake is has not waist, which is why it doesn't wear waist beads'), and *usijambejambe ukweni* ('don't fart carelessly while at the in-law's residence'). Some others are pure mockery, e.g. *vishindo vya mapumbu havishtui chupi ya kitenge* ('the threats of the scrotums do not bother kitenge underpant'), *kunya anye kuku akinya bata kaharisha* ('it is ok if a chicken shits, but when a duck does the same thing, it is called diarrhoea'), *jino moja mswaki wa nini?* ('With only a single tooth left, what is a toothbrush for?') and *mzaha mzaha mbuzi alimpanda mamake* ('a male goat's fooling around resulted in mating with its mother').

What one can infer from these positive pejorations is that they behave like

language play, which is heavily context-dependent. This language play, as Carter and McCarthy (2004) observe, is a creative manipulation of language that provides entertainment value to users and, at the same time, enables them to accomplish interactional goals. Citing their study of Kaskus in Indonesia, Djenar et al. (2018) observe that young speakers take it for granted that they can engage in language play in a wide range of interactional contexts with relatively little effort. These youths engage in ordinary, seemingly meaningless talk to cement youthful sociability and to promote intersubjective relations with co-participants. However, Chiaro (1992) cautions that for language play to be successful, it has to "play on the knowledge shared between sender and recipient" (p.11).

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that endearment among Kiswahili-speaking youths in Dar es Salaam is a multidimensional and context-sensitive linguistic practice that extends beyond conventional address forms. In line with Grzasko's (2020) characterisation of endearments as an open lexical category, the data reveal substantial creativity and innovation. Participants employed conventional address terms such as *mpenzi* and baby. Still, they also generated context-specific expressions such as *malkia wangu* ('my queen'), *ua langu* ('my flower'), and *mtu wangu* ('my man') in affectionate ways. These expressions reflect urban linguistic dynamism and the fluid borrowing, metaphorization, and semantic extension typical of youth discourse. Such patterns confirm that endearment is not confined to a closed set of lexical items but is continually reshaped by peer culture and interactional needs.

The findings strongly resonate with the study's sociopragmatic framework. From this perspective, the affectionate meaning of expressions such as *kichaa wangu* ('my crazy one') does not reside in the lexical semantics of *kichaa* (mad person), which are ordinarily derogatory. Rather, their affectionate force emerges from relational closeness, shared norms, tone, and situational context. Among intimate friends or romantic partners, these expressions were interpreted as playful and bonding, whereas in formal contexts, they would be considered offensive. This supports the argument that endearment is an interactional achievement grounded in shared understanding and relational history, consistent with pragmatic theories of meaning negotiation.

The cognitive linguistic dimension of the theoretical framework is also clearly reflected in the findings. Kövecses (2006) emphasises that embodied conceptual metaphors of sweetness, warmth, desirability, and value often structure affectionate language. This pattern is evident in expressions such as *asali wangu* ('my honey'), *jamaa langu* ('this my pal') and *waridi la moyo wangu* ('rose of my heart'), which map domains of sweetness and beauty onto interpersonal relationships. These metaphorical constructions intensify emotional meaning by associating the addressee with culturally valued qualities. The recurrence of such imagery confirms that metaphorization is cognitively motivated and culturally embedded within Kiswahili-speaking youth discourse.

The results also extend previous empirical work on address forms. Studies by Kiesling (1998) and Afful (2006), as well as by Afful and Nartey (2013), have shown that address terms function as markers of solidarity and identity construction. The present study confirms these functions but broadens the analytical scope to include evaluative remarks, erotic expressions, solidarity markers, and positive pejoration. Evaluative remarks such as *mzuri wangu* ('my beautiful one') or *mtu wangu* ('my man') enhance the addressee's positive face and affirm their social value. Erotic expressions, particularly in romantic relationships, intensify exclusivity and emotional closeness through intimate descriptors and suggestive language. Solidarity markers such as *mshikaji wangu* ('my close friend') and *nakupenda sana mpenzi wangu* ('I love you so much my beloved') function as in-group identifiers that reinforce peer cohesion. Positive pejoration—evident in expressions like *kichaa wangu huyu* ('my crazy pal, this one') and *fala huyu* ('this silly fellow') used playfully—illustrates how apparent impoliteness may paradoxically reinforce intimacy when framed within trust and shared norms.

The prominence of positive pejoration strongly supports interactional theories emphasising shared understanding and relational history. Expressions that would be socially inappropriate in hierarchical or unfamiliar relationships were reinterpreted affectionately among close peers. This aligns with youth language studies highlighting mock impoliteness as a bonding strategy, while also demonstrating how such practices are locally shaped within the Kiswahili-speaking urban envir

onment.

The findings further resonate with intercultural research, indicating that affectionate language reflects broader cultural ideologies (Hwang 1991; Levidze 2019). In the present context, the frequent use of possessive constructions such as *-angu* ('my') in expressions like *moyo wangu* ('my heart') and *roho yangu* ('my soul') reflects relational interdependence and communal orientations characteristic of the speech community. At the same time, the incorporation of English borrowings such as *baby* and *sweetheart*, alongside localised innovations, signals the influence of globalisation and media exposure, paralleling Febrianti and Al-Auwal's (2020) observations on hybrid affectionate forms in digital communication. This interplay between local cultural norms and global linguistic resources underscores the adaptive and dynamic nature of urban youth discourse. By integrating address forms, evaluative remarks, erotic expressions, solidarity markers, and positive pejoration within a unified framework, this study addresses the limitation identified in earlier scholarship that focused primarily on address forms. The combined application of sociopragmatics, conceptual metaphor theory, and identity construction proves effective in explaining how these diverse strategies converge to perform relational work.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that endearment among Kiswahili-speaking youths functions as a complex sociolinguistic resource through which speakers negotiate intimacy, solidarity, hierarchy, and identity. The convergence of metaphorical creativity, contextual interpretation, and identity performance confirms that affectionate language operates at the intersection of cognition, culture, and interaction. By situating the analysis within the urban speech community of Dar es Salaam, the study not only supports existing theoretical perspectives but also extends them into an underexplored African sociolinguistic context.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Kiswahili-speaking youths in Dar es Salaam employ a rich and diverse set of linguistic strategies for expressing endearment. The findings reveal that while address forms are the most frequently used category, other forms—evaluative remarks, erotic expressions, solidarity markers, and positive pejoration—also play important roles in maintaining interpersonal relationships, signaling

affection, and consolidating social bonds. These findings confirm that Kiswahili is highly flexible and creative at both the linguistic and social-pragmatic levels. Words, phrases, and even clauses are manipulated to serve multiple relational functions, demonstrating that interpersonal communicative proficiency is critical, particularly in informal, basilectal contexts. The study's theoretical framework, which integrates sociopragmatics, conceptual metaphor theory, and identity construction, resonates strongly with the findings. Sociopragmatic insights explain how meaning emerges from context and relational dynamics, while cognitive-linguistic perspectives illustrate how metaphorical and culturally motivated imagery enhances affectionate communication. Additionally, the focus on identity construction illuminates how youths deploy endearment to signal solidarity, exclusivity, and peer-group belonging, consistent with prior work on address forms and identity (Afful 2006; Afful & Nartey 2013; Kiesling 1998).

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the sample was restricted to 77 youths in two wards of Ubungo Municipality, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other urban Kiswahili-speaking communities in Tanzania. Second, data collection relied on unstructured interviews and observations, which may be influenced by observer effects or participants' self-consciousness. Third, the study focused exclusively on spoken, informal interactions, leaving out digital communication platforms such as social media and messaging apps, which are increasingly influential in youth language practices.

Based on these limitations, future research could expand the geographical and demographic scope to include multiple urban and rural settings, thereby enabling cross-community comparisons. Investigations could also explore the evolution of endearment in digital communication, examining how technology-mediated interactions influence the form, frequency, and meaning of terms of affection. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how endearment practices shift with age, gender, and social mobility, providing deeper insights into the interplay between language, identity, and socialisation in Kiswahili-speaking communities. Overall, this study highlights the dynamic, context-sensitive, and socially creative nature of Kiswahili endearments, offering both theoretical and practical contri

butions to understanding language as a tool for interpersonal connection, identity negotiation, and cultural expression.

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