

# ***Death and dying: An analysis of the language used in coping with death in the Shona society***

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses the language that the Shona speaking people in Zimbabwe use in naming death and dying, describing the dead, and consoling the bereaved. The research derives its linguistic analysis from a Shona socio-cultural-religious perspective. Related to this perspective, is the concept of saving face and easing the tension caused by death and this notion can be understood in the light of the politeness principle that guides human communication. Interviews and participatory observations were employed as data collection techniques in order to establish whether the Shona people use their language ordinarily or they fine-tune it to suit specific situations, particularly the unpalatable social situations like death and dying (language for specific purpose). Undergirded by these theoretical frameworks and methods, the study established that the Shona people have the tendency of creating, packaging and re-packaging their language use in relation to the social dilemma confronting them. Indirect ways of referring to tabooed matters such as death are in tandem with the Shona semantic philosophy in which by 'indirection they find direction.' In this regard, reference to death and dying often take the form of some blunt and euphemistic words or phrases, idiomatic and metaphorical expressions as a way of coping with death and dying. Euphemistic words and expressions allow the Shona people to talk about unpleasant notions and neutralise the unpleasantness, for example, the subjects of death and dying.

## **Introduction**

The Shona speaking people regard subjects relating to death and dying, and illness and sex as taboo. Therefore, language is used to avoid directly saying such matters and prefer to talk about them in roundabout ways. Bakhtiar (2012) argues that, in each culture, taboo domains are subject to varying degrees of constraint and prohibition. In relation to this, the Shona people have traditionally felt uncomfortable to deal with the subject of death using straightforward terms. In this regard, Shona people resort to euphemisms, metaphors and idiomatic expressions for naming death and dying. Banana (1999, p. 27) argues that, the concept of death is unsettling, face threatening, unnatural, shocking and dreaded. Death is a disrupting suspicious phenomenon.

Whether owing to superstition, fear or some form of social respect, the fact still remains that when facing death, Shona language users try to soften the effect of what they really wish to communicate. These indirect expressions play an important role in revealing the Shona people's understanding of death and how they cope with death and dying.

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Fromkin and Rodman (1978, p. 277) observe that "... language use, and the words that are introduced into the language, reflect the views and values of society...". Thus, the vocabulary of the Shona people reflects their thinking and beliefs in relation to death and dying. Language is not used randomly. It is used to fulfill a specific purpose. In funeral contexts, language performs an expressive function, to express the Shona people's emotions, feelings and thoughts in connection with death. It is also important to note that Shona speakers vary their language use in accordance with the social situation in which they find themselves.

Death is taboo subject when it comes to conversation and thus, the thought of dying often times evokes fear and apprehension in people and people are often unprepared for the physical and logistical consequences of dying. Dying happen to everyone, yet people rarely discuss death. People across cultures have a hard time talking about death and dying and when they do, there is discomfort and difficulty speaking about the topic. The Shona people have a death-denying culture and by not being open about death and dying, they leave themselves unprepared to face other people's death and their own. In this regard, society exerts certain constraints on speech that has to do with tabooed matters that arouse fear and uncertainty in people. The type of language used at funerals reinforces the selective perception of speakers when talking about death and dying. Shona speakers possess a communicative competence when it comes to conversations on tabooed matters. They know when to speak or be silent, how to speak on each occasion, how to communicate meanings of sorrow and politeness.

Banana (1991, p. 27) notes that the Shona people have a paradoxical attitude towards death. Although death is viewed as a gateway to the next life, they nevertheless do not readily accept its occurrence. Death is never accepted as inevitable. Thus, despite the reluctance to mention the subject of death, no one can escape death and avoid the notions of death and dying. Grief and coping with loss therefore, require careful selection of vocabulary. In this regard, this article argues that the Shona use euphemistic language as a coping strategy.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is largely informed by the politeness principle and the conceptual metaphor theory in the interpretation of language use and choices made at funerals in the Shona society. However, before delving into these theories it is important to highlight the Shona concept of death because it is this perception that determines their choice of language.

### **The Shona concept of death and dying**

Among the Shona life is an endless enterprise, a vehicle from the visible beings to the invisible beings. Death is part of life, a gateway to life in the here-after. Thus, according to Banana (1991) the Shona people believe in life-death-Life. Death is not the end of life but the beginning of another life. The language that is used reflects the continuity of life after death. Most Shona funerals stress the close bond that exists between the living and the dead through language use. The Shona believe in life in the form of a spirit after death, during which a dead person can continue to bear influence on the community he /she left. Popenoe (1974, p. 409) argues that:

Religion provides support and consolation that help to overcome man's fear of the unknown, and his anxiety about the future... Religion provides significant emotional support in helping him to face life's uncertainties. Most religions also offer specific reassurance and hope about the final unknown, death, by defining a super-natural after life.

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Thus, religion can help the Shona people during the crisis by taking note of the basic events of a lifetime such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. Funerals therefore, help to ease the strain of the difficult period through employment of euphemistic language that neutralises the unpleasantness of death. Funerals give consolation especially in the case of language that surrounds death and dying.

According to Ogbu Kalu (1978, p. 177), a Senegalese Poet Birago Diop observed that in Africa:

Those who are dead are never gone:  
They are there in the thickening shadow,  
The dead are not under earth:  
They are in the tree that rustles  
They are in the forest  
They are in the house  
The dead are not dead

Death is therefore viewed as a mere passage from the human world to the spirit world. The passage enhances the spiritual powers so that one could now operate in the human environment and especially in the human family as a guardian, protective spirit, and power. This reality of the dead-among-the living for the Shona people attracts so much religious devotion that in many Zimbabwean communities the ancestors occupy more devotional attention than God, the Supreme Being.

It is important to note that an ancestor must have lived a morally worthy life and must have died a good death. This means that the person was not killed by lightning, did not drown or commit suicide. According to Vambe (2008, p. 131) in traditional Shona thought, death evokes a wide range of emotions that are presented as cultural givens; death evokes fear and is not something to wish for, even of one's sworn enemies. In most cases, the dead person is supposed to be revered and is described as the 'ever-good one' (*wafawanaka*).

When the Shona people mourn the dead, they use language that express a sense of loss of a loved one and a sense of mourning themselves as well. Death is viewed as a nuisance, a robber and a form of destructive force that cuts off social ties. Regardless of how strong and comforting religious beliefs maybe, death means the loss of a living being, the absence of a physical presence (*kurasikirwa nehama*). It is a time of sadness and mourning where language with a healing and soothing effect is appropriate.

Though the Shona people fear death, religion is their prime source of strength and hope. Most Shona people say *kuda kwaMwari* (it is God's will), *adanwa nevadzimu* (has been called by the ancestors). The Shona people are scared of death because it evokes several fears such as pain and suffering, and postmortem consequences. Death is the ultimate unknown and no one has survived it to tell others what happens afterward and it is human nature to want to understand and make sense of the world. However, death can never be fully understood while we are all still alive. Thus, people are overwhelmed by fear of non-existence, fear of eternal punishment, and fear of loss of control. These fears are understandable given that death is something that is out of the realm of human control.

Death, as Allan and Burridge (2006) have argued, is a fear-based taboo in which different fears coexist. Therefore, the taboo of death cannot be properly understood without considering the crucial role that traditional religion plays. Religion is generally thought to

provide a reason not only for living, but also for dying. Religious practices and funerary rituals immensely contribute to ease the transition from life to death. Hence, religious beliefs provide some sort of relief in the face of death, particularly the promise of an eternal life beyond physical death. The choices to adopt indirect communication can best be understood from the traditional concept of death in Zimbabwe where the Shona people believe in a future life. Thus, death is rarely expressed sharply as death. Taboo words are less obvious in the Shona society than are euphemisms as a result of 'dressing up' certain areas in life to make them presentable.

### **Politeness Principle**

Indirectness is a communicative strategy by means of which, the Shona speakers avoid being outspoken and attempt to hold a correspondence between their talk and face consideration. By virtue of euphemisms, as part of Shona language's politeness system, one finds it easier to communicate his or her intents without affronting the hearer's face and get rid of unpleasant terms such as death and dying with negative overtones. Barhtiar (2012) argues that, fear; shame and disgust are three principle factors motivating the use of euphemisms.

Euphemism is a face saving mechanism which emphasizes mutual cooperation in a conversation. Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 69) note that;

A social interaction is generally oriented towards maintaining face and language speakers' substitution of a euphemism for a blunt term is a common strategy for reducing negative face threat.

Thus, euphemisms succeed in saving face because of the distance principle, correlation principle and pleasantness principle that characterize their usage. Euphemisms become alternatives to socially distasteful terms. Contrary to taboo words where the signifier and referent are closely connected, in euphemisms, this distance is much farther and this distance determines the mitigating capacity of euphemistic expressions. Euphemisms are usually relevant to the taboo concepts for which they have been substituted and each euphemism has positive connotations compared to its taboo counterpart or has less negative overtones. Therefore, Allan and Burridge (2006) argue that, taboo language is offensive, dysphemistic, and against politeness standards and in that regard, it is condemned and replaced by euphemisms.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." They aver that human communication is universally guided by the desire to maintain and enhance one's own and other's public self-esteem. Thus, face is something that is emotionally invested, and can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interpersonal, social and public interaction. Therefore, when confronted with death, the Shona speakers work towards defending their faces from the threats of death by renaming it and find indirect ways of neutralising the fear associated with using tabooed terms. Through the use of euphemistic language people show their mutual cooperation in maintaining face in funeral interactions. By indirection the Shona people find ways of redressing death in an attempt to counteract the potential face damage associated with use of tabooed terms thereby giving face to the bereaved. This is supported by Mashiri et al (2002, p. 122) who say:

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... a competent speaker of Shona is therefore aware of speaking norms that prohibit verbal references to certain words and/or historical events, whose direct verbalisation could unleash forces of instability or stir grief...

Therefore, the use of euphemisms is highly effective in saving face and makes it possible for speakers to talk about death with little tension and apprehension. Euphemistic language help the Shona speakers to prevent the mentioning of socially distasteful topics of death and dying and ameliorate the most unpleasing connotations of these tabooed terms. Fernandez (2006) argues that, death is a timeless taboo in which psychological, religious and social interdictions coexist and euphemistic language is used in substituting the notions of death and dying in order to save face. The practice of using euphemisms for death in Shona traditional and modern society is likely to have originated with the magical belief that to speak the word 'rufu' (death) was to invite death, where to draw death's attention is the ultimate bad fortune. Thus, euphemisms are expressions for good omen.

### **Conceptual metaphor theory**

This approach claims that metaphors go beyond pointing to the similarities between entities and stand as means of creating, organising and understanding reality. In order to reify abstract elements, language users tend to relate them to our social and bodily experiences with the help of metaphorical language by means of which we are able to conceptualise those abstract concepts. Lakoff (1993, p. 203) argues that, a metaphor can be defined as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system." A metaphor is thus understood as a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing at the same time, a particular understanding of the world and a way to make sense of our experience. For example, the conceptual metaphor, 'to die is to sleep' (*arere*). There is a projection from a source domain sleep (*kurara*) onto a target domain die (*kufa*) and the association that constitute this metaphor map our perception about sleep onto our perception about death. It is in this correspondence between the source and the target domain where cognitive conceptualisation fulfills its euphemistic function. The source domain is therefore used to understand structure and in some cases, mitigate the target domain.

### **Methodology**

Findings presented in this article are based on participatory observations carried out in 15 funeral gatherings attended between March 2011 and March 2012. Since death is a tabooed subject which is usually avoided in public day to day conversations, interviews could not be carried at the funeral with the fear of opening the wounds of the bereaved. Thus, additional information was obtained by interviewing 40 informants outside the funeral context. These participants, whose age ranged between 20 and 60 years of age, comprised relatives and friends of the deceased; workmates and students at the University of Zimbabwe. The interviews were recorded and information was fused into the research analysis and findings. Gathered data was analysed from the perspective of politeness principle, conceptual metaphor theory and the Shona concept of death. The responses provided valuable insights into the influence of African traditional worldviews on language selection and use in coping with death and dying.

### Findings

The Shona proverbial, idiomatic and metaphorical euphemistic expressions which play an important role in revealing the Shona people's understanding of death and dying are illustrated in the tables below:

SHONA	ENGLISH DESCRIPTION AND IMPLICATION
wazorora	-has rested, is asleep but will reactivate to resume life duties
watorwa	-has been taken away, is therefore somewhere.
waenda	-has gone ahead of us where we will follow.
washaika	-has disappeared but will be recovered.
watungamira	-has gone ahead of us, has proceeded.
watsakatika	-has disappeared, is somewhere.
wapfuura	-has passed on to the next destination ahead of us.
watisiya	has left us, we will catch up with him/her.
warara	-is asleep, will wake up later.
watonhora	-has become cold.
wakotsira	-has gone asleep.
wawoneka	-has bid farewell to us.
wafuratira	-has turned his back on us.
wanyarara	-has become silent.
wadaidzwa	-has been called.
waparadzika	-has perished.
watsanwa	-has been angered and left us.
wapedza rwendo	-has completed his/her journey.
watanga rwake rwendo	-has embarked on a journey ahead of us.
mweya wake waenda	-his/her soul has gone; only the body is left.
watevera vadzimu	-has followed the ancestors.
wapedza pake	-has played his/her part and finished, our part is left.
watsamira churu	-has taken a rest on the anthill.
wapira gotsi	-has turned his/her back on us.
wafuga rake ega	-has been covered in his/her own blanket.
waneta	-has become tired and needs a rest
avete	-has gone asleep and will wake up later.
waputsika	-has fallen down but will rise again.
washaya	-has disappeared to an unknown place.
waenda kwamupfiganebwe	-has gone to a place whose door is closed by a large stone.

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<b>Language of consolation</b>	
SHONA	ENGLISH DESCRIPTION
Nematambudziko	-sorry for the difficult time
Atorwa naMwari	-has been taken by God
Atorwa nevadzimu	-has been taken by ancestors
Aiwa azorora	-has rested
Nguva yanga yakwana	-his/her time was due
Kuda kwaMwari	-it is God's will
Ndineurombo nekurasikirwa kwamaita	-I am sorry about the sad loss.
Ndineurombo	-my condolences.
Nedzinoparadza	-sorry for the destructive force that befall you.
Tikubatei maoko	-sorry for sad loss
Nedzataanira	-sorry for the sad gathering.
Zvatiwana	-sad moment has caught up with us this time.
Masiwa	-you are left behind, he/she has gone ahead of you.
Ndimi madziona	-you have seen the sad happenings.
Nemakuputswa	-sorry for the destructive force that befall you.

**Description of the grave and burying process**

SHONA	ENGLISH
Rinda	Grave
Churu	Anthill
Musha	Second home
Mupfiganebwe	A place whose door is closed by a big stone.
Wazorodzwa	Has been put to rest
Waradzikwa	Has been put to sleep
Waperekedzwa	Has been escorted to his/her final destination.
Waraswa	Has been thrown away.
Wadyarwa	Has been planted somewhere.
Wafushirwa	Has been covered underground

**Shona euphemisms used at funeral gatherings**

Euphemisms help in providing alternatives to dispreferred expressions pertaining death and dying in the Shona society at large. This is possible because of the distance principle, correlation principle and pleasantness principle that guide the operation of a euphemism.

Since death is viewed as taboo subject, the language of death has been avoided at great length by most Shona people. Thus, using the terms death, dying, dead (*rufu, kufa, afa*) is offensive, frightening, dysphemistic and against politeness standards. To neutralise the negative tone of such terms, the Shona people replace them with euphemisms. Death is an area which evokes fear and nervousness amongst the Shona people. In response to such fearful events, most of death language among the Shona people is created by virtue of euphemistic metaphors, idioms, circumlocutions, and expressions with implicature to refer to death in the most pleasant and distant way.

For example, *'aenda'*, (has gone), *'apfuura'*, (has passed on)

In such cases, euphemisms were to avoid threatening mourners' face by hiding the unpleasant aspects of taboo or applying words with more positive connotations to fit in words with their style of use. Thus, various linguistic devices such as remodeling, omission and figurative language are applied to ameliorate the most displeasing connotations of dysphemistic term,

*'Afa'* (has died), *'rufu'* (death)

From the observations and interviews, the researcher noted that euphemisms are proper means of talking about death and are mainly used to avoid affronting both mourners' and the bereaved's face. Shona speakers always avoid using words and expressions which are unpleasant, inappropriate or embarrassing to them or to whom they are conversing. Interviews with the University of Zimbabwe students, revealed that death is taboo subject because it scares people, it is the end of learning, family, pleasure and all the dreams. Because death instills much uncertainty and horror, it is an unpalatable subject hence the Shona find it extremely difficult to discuss death and cope with bereavement.

Following this, the study notes that, whether we acknowledge death or not, most of us fear death. Death remains a great mystery, one of the central issues with which religion and philosophy and science have wrestled since the beginning of human history.

Euphemistic language also gives the Shona people distance from their discomfort with death. People who die are (no longer with us) *'watisiya'*, (has gone ahead of us) *'watumamira'*. Some of the discomfort with the death and dying process has come about because death has been removed from common experience. This lack of personal experience with death and dying only adds to our sense of trepidation and fear.

Death in Shona society is understood in roundabout ways. Metaphors are used euphemistically to allow people to talk about unpleasant notions of death and dying and neutralise the unpleasantness. From the data gathered from Shona elders, the study notes that euphemisms are used to fill in the gaps of the abandoned taboo terms that refer to death in a crude and direct way. This avoidance of calling a spade a spade helps in stripping the taboo of its unsettling undertones. This manner of language use is in agreement with Allan and Burridge (2006) view that language users resort to euphemisms to avoid taboo terms that might cause distress for themselves and the receivers.

Wardhough (1998) argues that, taboo words and expressions are less obvious in our society than are euphemisms, as a result of 'dressing up' certain areas in life to make them more presentable. Thus, death and dying is still a heavily tabooed area in Shona society and the Shona people have indirect ways of referring to tabooed matters.

Death is understood in terms of a journey with a spiritual destination. Bultnick (1998) points out; human mortality is conceptualised as a departure from this world in which a basic domain of experience like death is understood in terms of a different and more concrete domain, as a journey, an association which provides the basis for the verbal mitigation of the taboo. The act of dying corresponds to the act of leaving, the destination of the journey is an encounter with the ancestors and the dying person is the one that embarks on the journey.

The vast majority of the metaphorical substitutes focus on the act of leaving, on the journey itself. In the journey-metaphor, the deceased *'mufi'* corresponds to the person



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that is capable of embarking on the journey and considered to be somewhere alive. The frequent use of verbs of motion such as: 'atisiya' (has departed); 'aenda' (has gone); 'apfuura' (has passed on); 'atungamira' (has gone ahead of us, has proceeded); 'atanga rwake rwendo' (has embarked on a journey); link death to a journey and denies the total cessation of bodily movement as an intrinsic attribute of death. Thus, these metaphors do imply the Shona people's negation of death. It is in this view of the deceased 'mufi' as a living being that these metaphors fulfill their euphemistic function. This conceptualization has its basis on the traditional belief of an afterlife beyond death where the soul will live forever with the ancestors.

In Shona society death is a rest. Death is viewed in terms of a peaceful rest after an earthly existence. In this way, death is viewed as a desirable condition, a positive judgment. The following words saliently capture this:

'Azorora' (has eternal rest), 'awana zororo' (has found rest), 'zorora murugare' (rest in peace), 'zorora maari' (rest in Him), 'nzvimbo yekuzorora' (resting place, the grave).

A rest or a sleep emphasises a transient state and thus, death is conceptualized as a temporary event. This leads to the ultimate denial of death as the deceased is assumed to be somewhere resting or sleeping especially when death is a result of terminal illness. In that way, death is transformed to a happening that is less threatening and temporary. The metaphorical expressions focus on life more than death thereby mitigates the taboo. Euphemisms mask the unpleasantness that comes with death and dying and function as consolation strategy to the bereaved.

Death involves cessation of bodily function and speech which are also present in a peaceful sleep. The conceptualisation which relates death to a rest or a sleep provides an effective euphemistic reference to the taboo mainly because this association ultimately leads to the denial of death as such. The dying person is no longer dead, but sunk in a comforting sleep. Thus, death provides some relief for the dying person. It is important to note that this association of death with rest is usually done during the death of old age because death of old age is expected and inevitable, the conclusion of a natural process.

Death is also viewed as a reward or an achievement. Far from being fearful or harmful, death involves a sort of liberation to which the deceased (*mufi*) and his/her survivors (*vanosara*) the bereaved will find some hope and consolation. The following phrases saliently capture this:

*Apedza pake* (has played his/her part to completion)

*Arwupedza rwendo* (has completed his/her journey)

Death is viewed as the end. Since life is understood as a process with a starting and end point with a time span, death is conceptualised as the final stage of that lifespan by means of the image of death as the end. Such expressions as:

*Mazuva ake ekupedzisira* (last struggling moments of existence)

*Afema kekupedzisira* (breath one's last breath)

*Izwi rake rekupedzisira* (his/her last word)

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The adjective (last), '*kupedzisira*' signal the end of the process.

Death is also conceived as a means by which God calls back his creation.

*Kufa murawu waMwari* (death is God's ruling)

*Rufu kuda kwaMwari* (death is God's will)

*Rufu kutonga kwaMwari* (death is the rule of God)

There is also a sense in which death is viewed as a beginning of a new existence. Death ushers someone into the world of spirits, referred to by the Shona as '*Nyikadzimu*'. Alternatively, they say '*Adanwa nevadzimu*', meaning he or she has been called by the ancestors. Even the vice President Mrs. Joyce T Mujuru alluded to the existence of ancestors at the burial of her husband when she said, "*VaMujuru vatove mudzimu wekwaMwendamberi*" (Mujuru is now an ancestor of the Mujuru family) (Sunday Mail 21 August 2012), as a way of acknowledging that death has come at the rightful time. Thus, while the departed person is remembered by name, he/she is not really dead, but alive and such a person is what is referred to as a living-timeless. According to the Shona people, while the dead (*vafi*) have no physical force, their power-force is greater and is a graduation into a new and higher life. The spirit is immortal and this is aptly expressed in the Shona phrase '*chinoora inyama mweya hauori*', meaning what perishes is the flesh but the spirit is immortal. This belief is evident in death and burial rituals in Shona society.

Though death has been expressed with a positive effect, it is also understood in terms of loss among the Shona people. The conceptual basis of this lies in the fact that life is perceived as a valuable subject and death is thus seen as the loss of this possession, Bultnick (1998, p. 44-45)

Death is an event that human beings cannot control, leaving them powerless in the face of the unavoidable event. Death is conceptualized as a loss; those who are left alive will regret and lament the loss. In this way, death does not provide any form of consolation or relief. This is demonstrated by the following statements;

*Ndine urombo nekurasikirwa nababa* (sorry for the sad loss of your father)

*Arasikirwa namai* (has lost a mother)

Thus, Banana (1991, p. 27), argues that, "death is a disrupting, suspicious phenomenon, unnatural, shocking and dreaded." Regardless of how strong and comforting traditional beliefs may be, to the Shona people death means the loss of a living being, the absence of a physical presence and a time of sadness and mourning. Mourning is therefore the recognition of a deeply felt loss. Aschwanden (1987, p. 211) posits that, "death indubitably remains one of humanity's basic problems, a problem people can only answer with symbols." Thus, death remains a fear based taboo among the Shona speakers which is usually talked about with care and euphemistically.

It is important to note that, from this study, the researcher realised that death has become a casual event or happening due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic that has sky-rocketed the death rate in Zimbabwe. People are dying every minute and society now experience these

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sad moments quite often such that the tension that used to be associated with death has been relaxed. People in some circles refer to death and dying in a jocular and very casual way. As such, the Shona people also adopt slang as a linguistic tool to name death and dying. This casual reference to death serves a euphemistic function in that it neutralises the discomfort faced by people when confronted by death and dying. By making use of slang, people come to terms with death. Such vocabulary includes:

SHONA SLANG	ENGLISH DESCRIPTION
Ashuzula	-has gone ahead of us
Atila	-has died
Ashamla	-has gone
Anyura	-has sunk/drown
Akushta	-has fallen asleep
Arova pasi	-has gone ahead of us
Agemuka	-has perished
Akita	-has died
Afriza	-has gone cold
Avhaya	-has gone ahead of us
Akoromoka	-has fallen down
Awoma	-has dried up
Abaya	-has gone
Masofa panze	-has died and people need space to mourn and furniture has been placed outside.

### Conclusion

Shona speakers make use of euphemistic language to conceptualise and verbalise the taboo of death and dying. Idiomatic and metaphorical expressions fit the purpose of euphemisms. In Shona context, people pass over, pass on, pass away, they are carried to rest, they rest, they fall asleep and do not die. These euphemisms rely on the Shona Traditional religious beliefs and the politeness principle that guide human communication on matters to do with death. However, in some instances people resort to direct references to the taboo, the words death and dying 'rufu', 'kufa'. The implication behind the direct use of taboo terms is that death belongs to human life and everybody has to die. In that way, everyone should come to terms with death and its implications. Thus, feelings, fears, and hopes help to cope better with the subject of death and dying.

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