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Morpho-syntactic Analysis of Sex-related Euphemisms and the Stretch of Dysphemism in Swahili

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Abstract
This paper analysed the morpho-syntax of sex-related euphemisms and their role in stretching dysphemism in Swahili. Euphemism formation mechanisms are reliant upon societal cultural values, which are not universal. Data were collected in Morogoro through observations, interviews, and Informal Focus Group Discussions (IFGDs). Findings indicate that the morpho-syntax of the noun and verb determines the formation of sex-related euphemisms and the extent of dysphemism. In terms of noun morphosyntax, sex-related euphemisms do not belong to the same class as taboos, amounting to 14 for male and 12 for female sexual body parts. Additionally, the class 9 agreement property -i is intentionally used to form sex-related euphemisms, which can create humour but also stretch dysphemism when uttered unintentionally. Regarding the morphosyntax of verbs, 40.9% of those tested signify sex-related euphemisms in Swahili, depending on speakers' morpho-syntactic manipulations. In conclusion, ignorance of Swahili morpho-syntactic structures may contribute significantly to sex-related dysphemism. Therefore, this paper recommends further study into how Swahili learners' morpho-syntactic structures may lead to sex-related dysphemism.

Keywords: *morpho-syntax, sex-related euphemism, dysphemism, Swahili*

Introduction

This paper analyses the morpho-syntax of Swahili sex-related euphemisms and their role in stretching dysphemism within the language. The term "euphemism" in this context encompasses all expressions used by speakers to replace sex-related taboo words (those considered offensive or blunt in public discourse) for the sake of social acceptability and politeness (Coleman, 1992; Fernández, 2008a; Pan, 2013; Tokar, 2015). Conversely, "dysphemism" refers to instances where supposedly euphemistic words perpetuate the derogatory nature of a taboo, thus rendering speech embarrassing or offensive to the audience or the subject matter itself. Consequently, this paper primarily focuses on the formation of euphemisms concerning male and female sexual body parts and sexual intercourse within the morpho-syntactic framework, along with their dysphemistic implications in Swahili.

Swahili, coded G41-42 in the list of Bantu languages (Maho, 2009), is a fitting subject for this analysis due to its status as a lingua franca and its widespread usage among the people of Tanzania. Its rapid global dissemination and adoption by institutions such as the African Union and regional integrations have fostered a growing interest in learning Swahili as a Foreign Language (SFL), both within Africa and internationally. The extensive presence of Swahili-speaking communities, both within and outside Tanzania, lends practical and theoretical significance to this paper. Practically, it raises awareness among learners, speakers, linguists, and translators about the prevalence of sex-related euphemisms within the realm of morpho-syntax that may lead to dysphemism when spoken unintentionally.

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Theoretically, it contributes to our understanding of how linguistic aspects, particularly elements such as morphology, syntax, and semantics, interact within the language and with culture.

In every society, certain subjects are deemed taboo and require careful consideration to avoid causing offence or discomfort. According to Mapunda (2015), taboos encompass a set of rules dictating what is permissible and what is not within a community. Similarly, Batibo and Kopi (2004, p. 3) define euphemisms as the indirect or softened language used to refer to sensitive or unpleasant topics, often employed to make them more palatable. Typically, when taboos are uttered in public, they can provoke embarrassment, prompting the use of euphemisms as substitutes. These euphemisms often initially surface as colloquial expressions or slang but may gradually gain wider acceptance within the community, eventually becoming normalized vocabulary or expressions.

The literature review reveals many studies on the development of euphemistic expressions (see Batibo & Kopi, 2004; Gathigia et al., 2015; Msuya, 2017; Munane, 2014). However, I observed variations in the focus and scope of these studies. While some scholars (e.g. Ren & Yu, 2013) examined the functions of euphemisms broadly, others (e.g. Tokar, 2015; Batibo & Kopi, 2008) described the specific mechanisms (strategies) involved in their formation. Furthermore, there are variations in the mechanisms themselves. For example, Tokar (2015) identifies consonant interchange, where the first letter of the taboo word is used, as well as borrowing, as primary mechanisms for forming euphemisms. For instance, the taboo word "fuck" can be replaced by "f-" as demonstrated in the sentence, "*I'm sorry I said the f- word*.

While Tokar (2015) mentions two strategies, Opindi and Kandagor (2016) identify ten strategies, which encompass spelling taboo words, writing tabooed words, employing morphemic constructions, repeating morphemes, altering syllable order, blending morphemes within a word, borrowing words, modifying sounds in a word, shifting meaning, and using complex phrases as the main strategies.

Batibo and Kopi (2004, p. 1) conducted a study on euphemistic and idiomatic expressions related to HIV/AIDS in Setswana. The authors note that due to the novelty of HIV/AIDS within Setswana culture, speakers have devised and embraced new terminology to convey various aspects of the disease. They further assert that common processes employed in euphemism formation in Setswana, like in other Bantu languages, include meaning extension, compounding, and borrowing. However, in another study by Batibo and Kopi (2008), seven processes were identified in the formation of sex-related euphemisms in Setswana. These processes comprise meaning extension (30%), borrowing (28.4%), compounding (25.6%), derivation/affixation (10.9%), coinage (2.6%), acronym (1.3%), and back-formation (0.3%).

In synthesising this literature review, the observed variation in euphemism formation mechanisms, as highlighted in the literature, leads us to generalize that the process of forming euphemisms is language-specific. Since the formation of euphemisms is contingent upon the cultural values of a particular society, it is not a universal phenomenon, and each speech community exhibits unique methods of creating euphemisms. Furthermore, the studies reviewed predominantly focused on the morphological aspects and underlying semantic nuances of euphemism formation. To the best of my knowledge, there has been limited attention given to the morpho-syntactic formation of euphemisms within the language under study. Additionally, the existing grammar resources for the language, the crucial reference for language learners, speakers and linguists, lack comprehensive coverage of euphemistic expressions, an aspect that holds significant importance. This paper makes a significant contribution to previous studies by examining how morpho-syntax plays a role in forming sex-related euphemisms and stretching dysphemism in Swahili.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of euphemisms lies in the etymological concept and the necessity they serve within a language. Historically, the term 'euphemism' was coined by Thomas Blount, a lexicographer, in 1656, defining it as 'a good or favourable interpretation of a bad word'. Derived from the Greek word ‘euphemismos’, it combines ‘eu’, meaning ‘good’, and ‘phemi’, meaning ‘speech’. Thus, euphemism denotes the practice of speaking in a tactful, polite and courteous manner, aiming to avoid causing embarrassment to listeners or the audience.

From an etymological perspective, Deng (2016) highlights four primary functions of euphemisms in English. Firstly, euphemisms are used for taboo avoidance, stemming from psychological origins and their role in communication. Secondly, they enable speakers to convey courtesy, employing subtle euphemisms to maintain politeness. Thirdly, euphemisms serve to obscure truth, particularly prevalent in politics and media discourse. Lastly, euphemisms inject humour into language; as noted by Hamilton and Foltzer (2021), these linguistic devices are ludic, effectively diffusing the seriousness of taboo subjects. The authors further illustrate that euphemisms related to bodily functions or sex provide examples of this function.

The theoretical foundation, rooted in the etymology and functions of euphemisms within language, is paramount for gathering and examining sex-related euphemisms found in Swahili oral texts. When sex-related terms are spoken during conversation, they often carry an air of impoliteness and can provoke humour, leading to laughter among those present (Karatepe, 2015). From this perspective, as humour and laughter frequently intersect with discussions of sex-related topics, they serve as crucial theoretical tools for data collection, analysis, and discussions within the current study.

Methodology

The data for this paper were gathered in Morogoro through observation. Using a notebook and pen, I documented words, phrases, and expressions pertaining to sexual topics and expressions. Additionally, I conducted Informal Focus Group Discussions (IFGDs) to follow up on and enhance the insights from the data gathered through observation. These two techniques were chosen due to the informal and colloquial nature of euphemistic expressions related to sexual matters. To facilitate open communication, a relaxed and humorous atmosphere, I selected informal language settings where individuals felt free to express themselves. Specifically, I engaged with individuals such as draft players, bodaboda cyclists, hotel receptionists, airtime sellers/buyers, and mobile money transaction agents/clients (e.g. M-pesa, Tigo Pesa) along Mazimbu, Msamvu, Ipoipo, and Pangawe streets in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania. These Swahili-speaking groups were selected based on a reconnaissance survey, which revealed their tendency to engage in humorous discussions where sexual matters are frequently highlighted.

Data Presentation and Discussion

This paper examines how the morpho-syntax of a language influences the formation of sex-related euphemisms and stretches language dysphemism. The discussion unfolds in two parts. Firstly, it describes sex-related euphemisms and their associated taboos within the framework of noun morpho-syntax, and secondly, it explores their manifestation within the morpho-syntax of verbs.

Describing Euphemisms within the Morpho-syntax of a Noun

In this section, the objective is to analyse and compare the severity of taboos associated with human sexual body parts alongside their euphemistic counterparts. The premise is that when a euphemistic expression and a taboo share the same noun class, the taboo's euphemism would likely extend into dysphemism. Given that many Swahili nouns linked to taboos pertain

to body parts, it is crucial to present the noun classes associated with them, as outlined in Table 1 below. After that, we can identify sex-related taboos and discuss the morpho-syntactic determination of sex-related euphemisms.

Table 1
Body parts and their noun class assignments

Class 3	(mu-)	**Noun Class**
Class 4	(mi-)	*mikono* 'arms', *miguu* 'legs', *midomo* 'mouths, *migongo* 'backs', **mikundu* 'anus',
Class 5 (θ-)		**tako,* 'buttock' *tumbo,* 'stomach' **pumbu, jicho* 'an eye', jino 'tooth' *goti* 'knee' *paja* 'thigh' *sikio* 'ear',
Class 6	(ma-)	**tako,* 'buttock' *tumbo,* 'stomach' **pumbu, jicho* 'an eye', jino 'tooth' *goti* 'knee' *paja* 'thigh' *sikio* 'ear',
Class 7	(ki-)	*kidole* 'finger', *kichwa* 'head', *kiuno* 'waist', *kidevu* 'chin', *kifua* 'chest',
Class 8 (vi-)		*vidole* 'fingers', *vichwa* 'heads', *viuno* 'waists', *videvu* 'chins', *vifua* 'chests'
Class 9 (N-)		***kuma* vagina' ***mboo* 'penis', *pua* 'nose'

The common noun classes for body parts are 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, and 9 (see also Nurse, 2003). Nouns marked with an asterisk imply body parts that are taboo in Swahili, while those marked with two asterisks imply taboos reflecting human sexual body parts. Unlike the noun structure in many Bantu languages (see Robinson, 2016; Rugemalira, 2005), Swahili nouns consist of two parts, namely prefix and stem. The noun class prefixes indicate the class of a particular noun; however, some nouns, including the female sex-related body part mentioned in Table 1, do not have clear noun prefix markers. These nouns are classified into respective classes based on their agreement properties in a sentence. For instance, class 9 is marked by a nasal (N), but words like *pua* 'nose' and *kuma* 'vagina' do not have a nasal sound, yet they fall under class 9 due to their morpho-syntactic agreement pattern, as exemplified in (1).

(1a). *Ny-umba* *i* *-me* *-ungu* *-a*
subject agreement tense -root -FV
'His/her house is burnt'

(1b) *-*kuma* *i* *-na* *-pend* *-w* *-a*
subject agreement -tense -root -passive -FV
'The vagina/penis is loved'

(1c) *-pua* *i* *-na* *-to* *-a* *kamasi*
subject agreement tense - root FV mucus
'His/her nose blows mucus'

The nouns in class 9 follow an agreement pattern of *-i* to denote subject (SM) and/or object (OM) marking within a verb. As mentioned previously, class 9 nouns in Swahili are typically marked by a nasal sound. However, certain nouns such as *kuma* and *pua*, which do not begin with a nasal sound, still fall under class 9 due to sharing the same morpho-syntactic agreement pattern with nouns that do begin with a nasal sound. Evidence suggests that these nouns underwent a historical change over time wherein they dropped the nasal sound but retained the agreement property. For instance, equivalent words in other Bantu languages (Swahili's sister languages) like Nyakyusa start with a nasal sound; for example, *kuma* is *i-nguma* (potentially borrowed from Swahili) or *i-ndutu* (original word), and *pua* is *i-mbulo* (Felberg, 1999).

The findings indicate that Swahili speakers use the agreement property of noun class 9 as a morpho-syntactic strategy to create euphemisms for sex-related body parts. Examples in (1) were examined within the framework of agreement analysis. To enhance comprehension of this technique, it is important to also consider it from a pronominal analysis perspective, as illustrated in (2).

(2)	*Ny-umba*	*i*	*-me*	*-ungu*	*-a*
	topic/preverbal subject	verbal subject	tense	-root	-FV
	'His/her house is burnt'				

The pronominal analysis illustrated in (2) involves highlighting the preverbal subject, which serves as the topic of a sentence, along with the subject or verbal object that agrees with this preverbal subject (topic). When crafting euphemisms for female or male sex-related body parts using this strategy, speakers typically opt to exclude the preverbal subject (a name for a female or male sexual organ) in favour of the verbal subject *-i* (the agreement property). During the data collection phase, I documented conversations containing euphemistic expressions for sex-related taboos, leveraging the agreement properties of class 9 where the names for female and male sexual organs are categorized. Examples in (3) demonstrate how speakers generate euphemisms for human sexual body parts within the domain of morpho-syntax.

(3a)	*i*	*-me*	*-ingi*	*-a*	*yote*
	Verbal subject	-tense	-root	-FV	the whole
	'The whole has entered'				

(3b)	*ni*	*-me*	*-i*	*-on*	*-a*
	Verbal subject	-tense	verbal object	-root	-FV
	'I saw it'				

The examples provided in (3) illustrate how speakers create euphemisms by excluding the preverbal subject and using only the verbal subject and/or object, *-i.* These sentences were excerpted from a recorded conversation between two lovers engaging in sexual intercourse, where one romantically uttered *'i-me-ingi-a yote*,' translating to 'the whole is in.' In support of this observation, while recounting this to my friends as a means of applying IFGDs, one of them interrupted with further testimony, saying:

> *Namimi pia siku moja nilipata kademu, mahaba yalipokolea kalisema, 'imeingia yote….imeingia yote'.*
>
> (Literal meaning), '*Also, one day I seduced a girl, and romantically, she cried out, 'the whole is in…. the whole is in.*

For them, these expressions served as euphemisms, avoiding direct mention of taboo words for male and female sex-related body parts, even in the context of intimate relationships. However, when unintentionally uttered in public, the same sentences from (3) were observed to convey dysphemism within the language. It was noted that in their everyday conversations, Swahili speakers commonly omit preverbal subjects and/or post-verbal objects, particularly when there is shared knowledge. However, when this occurs in reference to nouns requiring the class 9 verbal subject *-i,* the morpho-syntactic structure inadvertently takes on a humorous tone, suggesting sexual matters. This was observed on multiple occasions when speakers used this morpho-syntactic structure without a preverbal subject, such as in the sentence *imeingia*. For instance, during airtime transactions, laughter and disapproving looks were observed among Swahili speakers when the airtime seller asked the buyer, *imeingia*?' or *umeiona*? The laughter from bystanders and the buyer's frown suggested the dysphemistic

connotation of the utterance, which initially was intended as a euphemistic expression regarding sex-related matters.

To validate this assertion, I utilised a member check strategy by presenting this analysis to one of my friends. He endorsed the analysis, emphasizing that the morpho-syntactic structure of noun class 9 without a pre-verbal subject, such as in the sentence *imeingia*, is widely recognized even among educated Swahili speakers and may inadvertently evoke dysphemistic associations related to sex. He confirmed this by saying:

> *Tulipokuwa kwenye mafunzo ya uandishi, dada mmoja aliyekaa pembeni yangu akaniomba nimchomekee kamba ya mtandao. Baada ya kuchomeka nikamuuliza,'imeingia?' awali aliona kawaida, niliporudia kumuuliza, watu walisikia na kucheka sana, yule dada alikunja sura kuashiria kutoridhika na mazungumzo yetu.*
>
> (Literal meaning) *When we were at the writing training, a sister sitting next to me asked me to plug in the internet cable for her. After plugging it in, I asked her, 'Is it plugged in?' At first, she seemed calm. When I repeated the question, it elicited laughter from those around us, but the sister frowned, indicating her dissatisfaction with our conversation.*

The testimony provided by my friend suggests that this morpho-syntactic strategy is not confined solely to the less educated but extends to the educated Swahili community as well. Furthermore, the testimony suggests that the degree of dysphemism perceived depends on the proximity between the sender (speaker) and the receiver (listener). When this distance is close, dysphemism may not be readily apparent, whereas it becomes more noticeable when the distance is greater. This observation aligns with the findings of Opindi and Kandagor (2016), who highlight that a sex-related euphemistic message, when intercepted by an unintended recipient, can elicit shock or embarrassment, particularly if the social distance between the sender and the listener is significant.

The verbal subject and/or object marker, *-i*, which agrees with noun class 9 encompassing both female and male sexual organs, carries connotations of humour (jokes, amusement, and laughter) with sexual undertones. When this subject/object marker appears without its preverbal subject, it generates dysphemism when unintentionally uttered to an unintended audience. To mitigate dysphemism, speakers must include the intended preverbal subject to agree with the verbal subject/object. For example, the researcher conducted another survey to investigate this phenomenon and noted that when the seller added the preverbal subject *vocha* 'airtime' as in the question *vocha imeingia?* or *umeiona vocha?* it was well received by the interlocutors, with neither negative reactions nor laughter observed. This differed from situations where the preverbal subject was omitted. It elicited reactions such as laughter or frowning, indicating either amusement or disapproval, respectively.

In general, from the examples provided, we observed the strategy employed by Swahili speakers to create sex-related euphemisms. This strategy entails uttering vague expressions where the preverbal subject and/or object is omitted in favour of the vowel *-i*, serving as a subject marker (SM) and/or object marker (OM). These vague expressions, when unintentionally uttered to an unintended audience (when the distance is greater), become humorous and dysphemistic. To render them socially acceptable, the only viable modification is to incorporate the appropriate preverbal subject into the utterance, as further demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Dysphemistic expressions in -i and building strategy for acceptable expressions

Dysphemistic expressions	Gloss	Adding preverbal /post-verbal object	Gloss/literal meaning

i-me-zama	*It has sunk*	*meli i-me-zama*	The ship has sunk
i-me-vimba	*It has swallen*	*pua i-me-vimba*	The nose has swollen
		miguu imevimba	Legs have swollen
i-li-chanwa	*It was torn*	*karatasi ilichanwa*	The paper had been torn
		barua ilichanwa	The letter had been torn
i-me-ingia	*It has entered*	*meseji imeingia*	The message is delivered
u-me-i-ona	*Have you seen it*	*umeiona pesa?*	Have you seen the money?
		umeiona nyumba?	Have you seen a house?
i-na-uma	*Is aching*	*njaa inauma*	I am hungry
		pua inauma	The nose hurts
		miguu inauma	Legs hurt

The expressions listed in the first column of Table 2 solely feature the *-i* agreement property for class 9. When uttered publicly without the intent of conveying sex-related euphemistic sentiment, they tend to sound humorous and dysphemistic. However, upon adding an appropriate preverbal or post-verbal subject/object, they transform into acceptable expressions, as demonstrated in column three of the table. Nevertheless, speakers may purposefully utilize the same expressions from the first column of the table as a technique to create euphemisms for male and female sexual body parts within the morpho-syntax of a noun.

Mismatching between the classes for sex-related taboo words and their euphemisms represents another method speakers employ to achieve the desired euphemistic effect. The data collected and analysed aimed to determine whether the taboos and the euphemisms fell within the same class. To illustrate this, we recorded numerous oral texts from Swahili speakers in various settings. As an example, one day my friend and I were driving from Pangawe Village to Morogoro Town. While on the way, an elderly individual flagged down our car and requested a lift, which we gladly provided. During the journey, the elderly individual said to us:

> *Wanangu nawashukuru kwa lifti yenu, lakini kama kuna mmoja wetu jogoo wake hawiki asisite kuniambia, mimi ni mtaalam na hii ndo kazi yangu, nitakusaidia. Maana ni aibu kwa mwanaume na heshima nyumbani hupotea kama jamaa hasimami.*
> Literal meaning: *My sons, I thank you for your lift, but if there is one of us whose cock is not crowing, don't hesitate to tell me, I am an expert and this is my job, I will help you. It is a shame for a man and respect at home is lost if the guy does not stand up.*

Based on this exemplary statement and several recorded oral texts, numerous euphemistic expressions were identified, coded, and analysed, as detailed in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Some coded Sex-related euphemisms from oral texts

Expression	**Literal meaning**	**Meaning**	**Euphemism**
huyu kaka anapenda vitobo	this brother likes piercings	*likes vagina*	*vitobo*
kitumbua chake kitamu	her bun is delicious	*her vagina is sweet*	*kitumbua*
amekula mzigo	he has eaten the load	*has sexed*	*mzigo*
jogoo wake hawiki	his cock doesn't crow	*his penis doesn't erect*	*jogoo*
mwanaume mashine	machine marks a man	*big penis marks a man*	*mashine*
jamaa kalala	the guy is asleep	*the penis contracts*	*jamaa*
mwanaume kachukia	the man is angry	*the penis has erected*	*mwanaume*
mfiche babu huyo	hide your grandfather	*hide that penis*	*babu*

amesimamisha uume wake	he has made his mankind erected	*has erected penis*	*uume*

The sentences provided in Table 3 serve as euphemisms for male and female sexual body parts. Among these euphemisms are those that depict both human and non-human entities. Examples of euphemisms representing human entities include *jamaa* 'somebody', *mwanaume* 'a man', and *babu* 'grandfather'. By analysing their agreement properties, we examined the noun classes for these euphemisms. Euphemisms representing human entities are classified within class 1, which is designated for human beings. However, other entities such as birds and animals, although not human, assume the status of human beings based on their agreement properties, as illustrated in (4).

(4). Class 9/10 *ngombe* ***wake a****-na-kunywa maji / ng'ombe* ***wake wa****-na-kunywa maji*
cow his ***3s****-TA-drink water/cow his* ***3p****-TA-dring water*
'His cow is drinking water/his cows are drinking water'

Class 9 /10 *θ -punda* ***wake a****-na-kunywa maji/ punda* ***wake wa****-na-kunywa maji*
θ -donkey his ***3s****-TA-drink water/donkey his* ***3p****-TA-dring water*
'His donkey is drinking water/his donkeys are drinking water'

Class 1 /2 *m-toto* ***wake a****-na-kunywa maji /* ***wa****-toto wake* ***wa****-na-kunywa maji*
1cl-child his ***3s****-TA-drink water/2cl-child his* ***3p****-TA-drinking water*
'His child is drinking water/his children are drinking water'

The examples in (4) demonstrate how class 9/10 shares the morpho-syntactic agreement property with class 1/2, as indicated by the bolded words. However, certain non-human animates such as *jogoo* 'cock' are classified in class 1, akin to the class for human beings, and their class must be marked by a letter, thus falling under class 1a (see Rugemalira, 2005). Regarding these shared agreement patterns, we observed that euphemisms for male sexual body parts like *mzee*, *jogoo*, and *mwanaume* do not exhibit this agreement property for class 9, resulting in minimal or no sexual sentiments being conveyed when these words are uttered in isolation in public.

The sex-related euphemisms were analysed from recorded Swahili humorous oral texts. Below is an excerpt from one such oral text (recorded humorous conversation) among a group of Swahili speakers, where one of them remarked:

> *Ni kosa kuita kitu cha wanawake tundu maana tundu lazima litokee upande wa pili. Hivyo, kwa kuwa kitu hicho hakitokei upande wa pili, kinapaswa kuitwa shimo.*
>
> *Literal meaning: It is wrong to call thing of women a hole because the hole must appear on the other side. Thus, since that thing does not appear on the other side, it should be called a hollow.*

During this humorous exchange, we identified three sex-related euphemisms for female sexual body parts: *tundu* 'hole', *kitu* 'thing', and *shimo* 'hollow'. In general, Table 4 provides examples of sex-related euphemisms analysed from humorous conversations within the morpho-syntactic framework of a noun.

Table 4
Noun classes for female body parts and their Euphemisms

Body part	**Gloss**	**Class**	**Euphemisms**	**Noun Class**	**Literal meaning**
Kuma	vagina	9	*ki/vi-tumbua* *ki/vi-tobo*	Class 7 & 8 Class 7 & 8	rice burn hole

	m/mi-zigo	Class 3	luggage
	mali	Class 5	wealth/property
	mbunye	Class 9	(coined word)
	papuchi	Class 9	(coined word)
	mbele	16 (locative)	front
	katikati	16 (locative)	centre/middle
	uke	Class 14	womanhood
	kitenge	Class 7	*kitenge*
	k	Class 9	initial letter
	tundu	Class 5	hole
	maku	Class 9	(syllable swap)

Table 4 shows 13 euphemisms for female sexual body parts, of which 4 share the class of their respective taboo. Nonetheless, these euphemisms effectively serve their purpose, as they are not widely recognized by many speakers. Among them, two have been formed through coinage, one through syllable metathesis, and the other by taking the initial letter of a taboo word. In comparison, Table 5 below presents euphemisms for male sexual body parts along with their respective classes.

Table 5
Noun classes for male body parts and their Euphemisms

mboo	*penis*	9	*jogoo,*	Class 1a	cock
			m-dudu	Class 1a	an insect
			m/talimbo,	Class 3	Crowbar
			m-hogo	Class 6	cassava
			jamaa	Class 1	Somebody/guy
			babu	Class 1	grandfather
			uume	Class 14	manhood
			mashine	Class 6	machine
			paipu (pipe)	Class 5	pipe
			bomba	Class 5	pipe
			mpini	Class 3	hoe handle
			tango	Class 5	cucumber
			kitu	Class 7	thing
			dude	Class 5	a big thing

Table 5 above presents 14 euphemisms for male sexual body parts, none of which share the class of the taboo. From the data provided in Tables 4 and 5, three observations can be drawn. Firstly, the data indicate that in Swahili, euphemisms for both female and male body parts are numerous (13 for female and 14 for male sexual body parts) compared to other taboo body parts. When these taboos are publicly uttered, they are considered obscene and can cause significant embarrassment. Consequently, speakers tend to seek out more words to substitute sex-related taboos. In essence, due to the nuanced nature of their taboo words, some of these sex-related euphemisms evolve to closely resemble the sexual connotation of the intended taboos. Findings from Batibo and Kopi (2008) support this analysis by demonstrating that in Setswana, euphemisms for both male and female body parts constitute the highest number.

The second notable observation derived from the data presented in Table 4 above pertains to a discrepancy between the classes assigned to taboos and their corresponding euphemisms. Notably, while the taboos are categorised under noun class 9, their euphemisms span a broader range, encompassing classes 1, 1a, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 17. This

incongruity serves as one of the mechanisms employed by speakers to mitigate the severity associated with euphemisms, potentially indicating a form of dysphemism. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that four (4) out of the thirteen (13) euphemisms share the same noun class as the taboo words referring to the female sexual body parts. Among these euphemisms, two are coined terms, one is an initialization, and the last is derived through syllable metathesis.

The third aspect observed in Table 4 and Table 5 concerns the linguistic strategies employed in forming euphemisms. The first strategy involves semantic extension, which constitutes 60% of the documented Swahili sex-related euphemisms. Speakers attach extra meaning to existing lexical items such as '*jogoo*', '*babu*', and '*jamaa*', thereby creating euphemistic expressions. Within this approach, the classes assigned to these euphemisms deliberately diverge from those of their corresponding taboos, aiming to mitigate the potential for dysphemism, given the familiarity of these words. The second strategy, accounting for 20% of the recorded Swahili sex-related euphemisms, entails coinage, where new words (neologisms) emerge in the language. Examples include '*mbunye*' and '*papuchi*' denoting a female sexual organ. In this strategy, euphemisms often share the same class as their taboo counterparts. These coined words do not significantly contribute to linguistic dysphemism, as these terms are not widely familiar among speakers. Additional strategies encompass initialization (10%) and syllable metathesis (10%). These strategies predominantly revolve around euphemisms related to the female sexual organ. For instance, the initial letter 'K' is employed as a euphemistic marker in utterances, while syllable swapping, such as swapping '*ku*' with '*ma*' to yield '*maku*', serves as another technique for euphemistic expression.

In this context, the stretch of dysphemism becomes apparent when speakers unintentionally employ words whose meanings have been expanded to include euphemisms for sexual body parts, using them to convey their original sense. Essentially, sentences featuring nouns that double as euphemisms for sexual taboos, even when not intended as such by speakers, still convey an underlying sexual connotation. Consequently, dysphemism proliferates, as illustrated by examples in (5).

(5a) *M-hogo wa huyu kaka m-tamu*
Cassava of this brother is sweet

(5b) *Mi-hogo ya huyu kaka mi-tamu*
Cassavas of this brother are sweet

The two sentences were previously spoken by Swahili speakers during informal conversations. Upon utterance, it was noted that the first sentence elicited considerable laughter among the participants, unlike the second sentence. This laughter indicated that the first sentence carried underlying sexual connotations, as it was structured with the class 3 (singular) noun prefix *mu-,* while the class 4 (plural) noun prefix had no impact on linguistic dysphemism. Furthermore, it was observed that even when referring to consuming a single piece of cassava, one should use the class 4 noun prefix *mi-* in any utterance, as in '*mihogo ya huyu kaka ni mitamu',* rather than the typical class 3 prefix *mu-* as in '*mhogo wa huyu kaka ni mtamu*', to mitigate the risk of conveying linguistic dysphemism.

As previously mentioned, Swahili sex-related euphemisms often manifest within contexts of humorous conversations marked by laughter. The validation of laughter as a criterion for analysing these euphemisms is supported by two distinct scenarios I documented. In the first scenario, I observed a conversation among three individuals. I stood alongside one of the interlocutors when another person joined us, followed by the sudden arrival of a woman. The man beside me proceeded to embrace the woman. An onlooker cautioned the woman, saying, '*Usimkumbatie huyo maana ni mtu mbaya sana kwa wanawake',* meaning 'Do not

hug him, for he is very bad for women.' The individual to whom this statement was directed responded by saying:

> *Kuhusu huyu dada huniambii kitu kwa sababu mimi ndiye niliyempokea kwenye mji huu na kwa taarifa yako ninayafahamu matundu yote ya huyu dada*
>
> Literal meaning: *You can't tell me anything about this sister because I am the one who welcomed her to this city, and for your information, I'm familiar with all her holes.*

The man's response elicited big laughter from everyone present, while the woman who was hugged displayed a negative reaction and departed without saying goodbye. This laughter underscored the underlying sexual connotation conveyed by the morpho-syntax of the Swahili word '*matundu*' meaning 'holes.

In the second scenario, one day during breakfast in the tearoom with my colleagues, I decided to test the use of the noun '*kitobo*' and its plural '*vitobo*', As we were enjoying our meal, I addressed the person selling doughnuts, known as '*donati*' saying, '*mimi nataka maandazi yaliyotobolewa katikati*' (I want doughnuts with a hole in the middle). Before I could finish, someone interrupted, asking if I wanted a doughnut. I responded affirmatively, saying, '*ndiyo, maana ninapenda vitobo'* (yes, because I like holes). This remark prompted laughter from almost everyone present, though some individuals, particularly those over the age of 50, appeared displeased.

Generally, this subsection has provided an overview of sex-related euphemisms and the manifestation of dysphemism within the morpho-syntax of nouns. It is evident that euphemisms referring to sex-related body parts are numerous and typically do not align with the noun classes of the corresponding taboo words. Additionally, speakers employ the agreement property *-i* for class 9, where names of human sexual body parts belong, as a morpho-syntactic technique for crafting sex-related euphemisms. However, it was observed that unintentional use of the agreement property *-i* by speakers can result in humorous discourse and stretch dysphemism in a language.

Describing Euphemisms within the Morpho-syntax of a Verb

In the realm of verb morpho-syntax, it was observed that many verbs in Swahili may or may not convey euphemistic meanings related to sexual intercourse. Morpho-syntax primarily determines whether a verb carries such euphemistic connotations. To investigate this, we compiled a list of 171 verbs sourced from recorded oral texts in various settings conducive to open communication, including public transport (daladala, buses, bajaji, and bodaboda), bars, restaurants, workplaces, homes, workshops, churches, and classrooms. The findings reveal that out of the 171 verbs analysed, 70 (40.9%) have the potential to convey sex-related euphemisms and/or dysphemism. Figure 1 depicts the prevalence of sex-related verbs compared to common verbs using a bar graph.

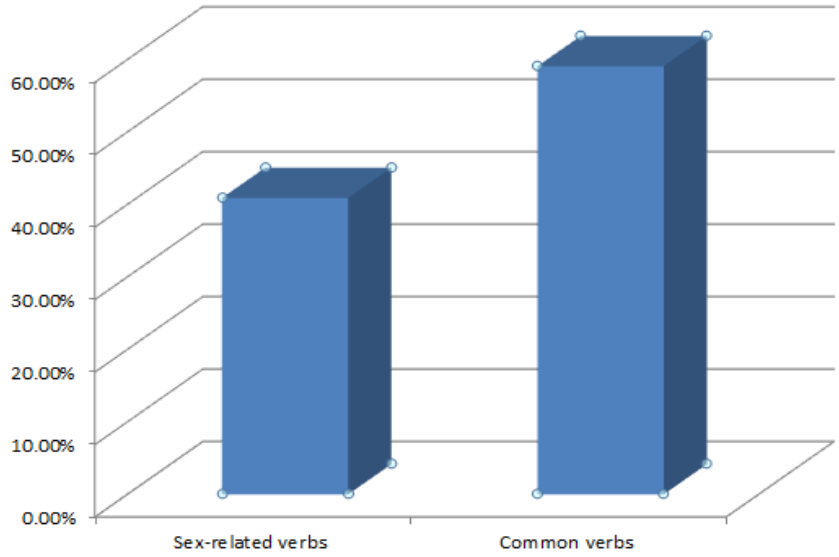

Figure 1. Bar graph showing the relationship between sex-related verbs and common verbs

Figure 1 above shows that 40.9% of the tested verbs have the potential to convey sex-related euphemisms within the morpho-syntactic framework, while 59.1% of the tested verbs do not exhibit such connotations. Table 6 below presents a list of select verbs that were tested, along with comments indicating whether or not they may function as sex-related euphemisms and/or contribute to linguistic dysphemism, where the symbol [+/-] implies may or may not whereas [-] implies does not.

Table 6
List of verbs and comments on features of euphemisms and dysphemism

Verb stem	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss	Euphemism	Dysphemism
tia	put	*a-me-tia*	He has put	+/-	+/-
gonga	hit	*a-me-gonga*	He has hit	+/-	+/-
fanya	do	*a-me-fanya*	He has done	+/-	+/-
kula	eat	*a-me-kula*	He has eaten	+/-	+/-
kamua	milk	*a-me-kamua*	He has milked	+/-	+/-
pakua	save	*a-me-pakua*	He has saved food	+/-	+/-
lamba	lick	*a-me-lamba*	he has licked	+/-	+/-
ingiza	enter	*a-me-ingiza*	He has entered it	+/-	+/-
kaza	tighten	*a-na-kaza*	He tightens	+/-	+/-
oga	bathe	*a-me-oga*	He has taken a shower	-	-
jenga	build	*a-me-jenga*	He has built	-	-

Table 6 presents examples of tested verbs in Swahili that may or may not convey sex-related euphemisms and/or dysphemism. The morpho-syntax plays a crucial role in determining the potential euphemistic expressions of these verbs. Therefore, it is valuable to illustrate how the morpho-syntax of these verbs can influence their interpretation in terms of sex-related euphemisms and/or dysphemism. To illustrate this point, we will examine three verbs (*pakua, lala*, and *gonga*) from the table as examples, as demonstrated in (6).

(6a) *a* *-me* *-paku-* *a*

SM TA OM VB FV
S/he has dished up'

(6b) *a -me m- paku- a*
SM TA OM VB FV
'S/he has dished him up'

(6c) *a -me mu-paku -li -a*
SM TA OM-VB App FV
'S/he has dished up for him/her'

(6d) *a- me- paku- li- w -a*
SM TA VB APL PAS FV
'S/he has been dished up'

The morpho-syntax of the verb '*pakua*' in the first sentence does not suggest a sex-related euphemism; it simply indicates that someone has dished up. However, in the second sentence, by adding an animate object marker, the verb '*pakua*' takes on a sex-related euphemistic meaning, implying that someone has engaged in sexual intercourse with somebody. From a morpho-syntactic perspective, the verb '*pakua*' typically does not require an animate object marker unless it is accompanied by an applicative suffix, as shown in example (6c). When Swahili speakers deviate from this structure and use the verb '*pakua*' with an animate object marker *-m-* without an applicative suffix, it conveys a sex-related expression in the language, as demonstrated in example (6b). Additionally, in active voice sentences (as seen in 6a & c), the verb '*pakua*' does not inherently convey a sex-related expression that could be interpreted as a euphemism. However, when the verb is in passive voice (expressed within the morpho-syntactic structure), it transforms into a sex-related euphemism and/or dysphemism, as shown in example (6d).

Furthermore, when the verb *lala* 'sleep' is analysed within the morpho-syntax, it may or may not convey a sex-related euphemistic expression in Swahili. Examples (7a-d) illustrate how the verb *lala* can signify sex-related euphemism and/or dysphemism depending on its morpho-syntactic context.

(7a) *a -me -lal -a*
SM TA sleep -FV
'He is asleep'

(7b) *a -me -m -lal -a*
SM TA OM sleep FV
's/he has slept her/him'

(7c) *wa -me -lal -an -a*
SM TA sleep APL FV
'They have slept one another'

(7d) *a -me -lal -w -a*
SM TA sleep Pass FV
'S/he has been slept by somebody'

The examples in (7) consist of sentences extracted from oral texts to illustrate how the verb '*lala*' may or may not refer to sexual matters. In sentence (7a), the morpho-syntax of the verb '*lala*' does not imply any sexual connotation. However, in sentence (7b), the addition of an object marker *-m-* signifies sexual matter, thereby transforming the morpho-syntax of the verb '*lala*' into a sex-related euphemism when intentionally uttered. Primarily, the verb '*lala*' is intransitive, meaning it does not require an object to convey its meaning. Nonetheless,

Swahili speakers often manipulate the morpho-syntax of '*lala*' by appending an object affix -*mu*- specifically for human beings, resulting in the formation of sex-related euphemism.

Furthermore, in sentence (7c), the morpho-syntax of the verb '*lala*' suggests a sense of sexual intensity, thereby functioning as a sex-related euphemism. It's noteworthy that in this sentence, the verb '*lala*' wasn't intended to take on a reciprocal suffix *-an-;* thus, technically, the verb is unergative, with a subject that does not necessitate an object to convey its meaning. Moving to sentence (7d), '*lala*' serves as an accusative verb without a direct object, rendering it unable to be transformed into a passive construction. Lusekelo (2013) categorizes verbs like '*lala*' as inchoative, as they describe a change of state or movement, like the verbs "disappear" or "arrive". Incorporating an object marker *-mu-,* reciprocal suffix -*an-,* or passive marker *-u-* to the verb '*lala*' to render it transitive, unergative, or accusative respectively, represents one of the strategies employed by Swahili speakers to create sex-related euphemism. Through this morpho-syntactic manipulation, numerous verbs can potentially function as sex-related euphemisms. However, if not carefully observed, these constructions may automatically convey a sense of impoliteness, thereby stretching dysphemism when uttered unintentionally.

The examples in (8) illustrate how the morpho-syntax dictates the potential for a Swahili verb to be utilized as a sex-related euphemism. These examples specifically focus on the verb *gonga* 'hit'.

	A		**B**
(8a)	*a-me-gong-a*		*lori li-me-gong-a*
	3s-TAM-hit-FV	*Lorry*	*it-TAM-hit-FV*
	's/he has hit'		*'Lorry has hit'*
(8b)	*a-me-m-gong-a*		*lori li-me-m-gong-a mwendesha pikipiki*
	3s-TAM-3s-hit-FV		*Lorry it-TAM-3s-hit-FV motorcyclist*
	's/he has hit him/her'		*'The lorry has hit the motorcyclist'*
(8c)	*a-me-gong-w-a*		*mwendesha pikipiki a-me-gong-w-a na lori*
	3s-TAM-hit-psv-FV		*motorcyclist 3s-TAM-hit-psv-FV by lorry*
	'has been hit'		*'The motorcyclist has been hit by a truck'*
(8d)	*wa-me-gong-an-a*		*waendesha pikipiki wa-me-gong-an-a*
	3p-TAM-hit-Rec-FV		*motorcyclist 3p-TAM-hit-Rec-FV*
	'they have collided'		*'The motorcyclists have collided'*

Using the examples provided earlier, it is evident that verbs in Swahili can convey sex-related euphemisms through the language's morpho-syntax. Verbs indicating sexual sentiments often involve the insertion of inappropriate object markers for human beings, such as class 1 and class 2 markers *-m-* and *-wa-* respectively, or the addition of passive or applicative suffixes. When passive or applicative suffixes are attached to verbs known to convey sexual sentiments, they intentionally signal sex-related euphemisms, as shown in Column A. However, if speakers do not intend to express euphemisms using these verbs, they must include appropriate preverbal subjects, as indicated in Column B.

Regarding the proliferation of dysphemism, when a speaker unexpectedly uses constructions with verbs that convey sex-related euphemisms, it stretches dysphemism within the language. This inference stems from various observed instances wherein verbs like *kamua* and *pakua* within morpho-syntactic constructions have extended dysphemism. For example, we noted laughter from unintended listeners and negative reactions from intended listeners when a particular speaker uttered:

Watu wa vijijini wanamenya miwa kwa mdomo, huku Moro watu wanamenyewa na wauzaji, lakini nilishangaa kuona watu wa Dar wanakamuliwa.

Literal meaning: *Rural people peel sugarcane with their mouths, while in Moro people are peeled by sellers, but I was surprised to see Dar people being squeezed up.*

When this statement was directed towards fellow speakers, it elicited laughter from many individuals. Upon inquiry as to the reason for their amusement, they collectively cited the word '*wanakamuliwa'* as inappropriate and dysphemistic, as it conveys unintended sexual connotations that the speaker did not intend to convey.

Another incident involves the verb '*pakua',* which was analysed in a conversation between two Swahili speakers, as follows:

Speaker 1: *kaka habari ya siku nyingi?*
How are you brother?
Speaker 2: *nzuri kaka, vijana wetu hawajambo?*
I am fine brother. How are our children?
Speaker 1: *Hawajambo ndugu yangu, vipi wenzao?*
They are fine my brother, how are their fellows?
Speaker 2: *wazima damu yangu, njaa inaniuma sana*.
They are fine my blood; I am very hungry.
Speaker 1: *Mwambie mama watoto akupakulie chakula.*
Inform my children's mother to give you some food.
Speaker 2: *ngoja niende kaka.*
…… (baada ya kula)
Yes, let me go……..(after eating)
Speaker 1: *vipi kaka umepakuliwa?*
…….. (laughter from people around them)
What's up! Have you dished up?
Speaker 2: …..*Mshenzi wewe, nani amepakuliwa?*
Ideot! Who has been dished up?
Speaker 1: ……*samahani ndugu yangu ulimi umeteleza.*
……I am sorry my brother, the tongue has slipped.

In the conversation provided above, we observe two constructions of the verb '*pakua*'. In the first construction, the verb '*pakua*' is accompanied by the object marker *-ku-* for second person singular, co-occurring with the applicative suffix *-li-* as in '*a-ku-paku-li-e'* (where the mood is subjunctive marked by final vowel *-e*). With this construction, no laughter or negative reaction was observed, and Speaker 1 appeared to be polite. In the second construction, the verb '*pakua*' involves the co-occurrence of the applicative and passive suffixes, *-li* and *-u* (or *-w*) respectively. With this construction, laughter and negative reactions were observed, indicating dysphemism. Speaker 1, by uttering this sentence, was perceived as impolite. Dysphemism arose from the combination of the applicative and passive affixes, which, with the verb '*pakua*', could potentially signal sex-related euphemism, on the one hand, and can stretch dysphemism, on the other hand. However, Speaker 1 did not intend to convey such connotations, and the subject matter was not related to sexual matters.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has presented how the morpho-syntax of a noun and verb provides the fertile soil for speakers to form sex-related euphemisms and stretch of dysphemism. Starting with the former, sex-related euphemisms are numerous as, in this paper, they amount to 13 and 14 for female and male sexual matters, respectively. Also, speakers formulate sex-related

euphemisms that do not share the class with the entities they represent to ensure that the euphemisms achieve their purpose and hence reduce dysphemism in a language. Additionally, the agreement property *-i* for class 9 where names for human sexual body parts fall is intentionally used to form sex-related euphemisms as a morpho-syntactic technique, on the one hand, and it creates humour and stretches dysphemism when used unintentionally, on the other hand. Because of that, adding an appropriate preverbal subject and the post-verbal object with the agreement property *-i* becomes a building strategy for acceptable utterances.

Coming to the latter, the findings indicate that 40.9% of the verbs tested may signify sex-related euphemisms, in Swahili, depending on the kind of manipulations made by speakers. The manipulations include improper use of the animate object marker *-mu-* to verbs that do not require it such as *-lala* 'sleep', and *la* 'eat', addition of a reciprocal suffix *-an-* to unergative verbs that do not require it, and adding a passive suffix *-w-* to accusative verbs such as *lala* 'sleep' and *jua* 'know'.

This paper, therefore, concludes that Swahili sex-related euphemisms formed within the morpho-syntactic framework are humorous and dysphemistic when uttered unintentionally. Also, the morpho-syntactic structure of Swahili may automatically and unknowingly subject speakers to making sex-related dysphemistic expressions. In this view, the paper recommends a further study about the extent to which Swahili learners embark into uttering sex-related morpho-syntactic structures unknowingly.

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