

Mitigating face-threatening acts in ethnic languages: A case of Chindali conversations in Songwe Region, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Understanding how to mitigate face-threatening acts in the course of making communication offers valuable insights into the unique nature of languages and communities. This paper examines how address terms manage face-threatening acts in Chindali conversation. The study is based on a qualitative research design whereby the data were collected by participant observation and interviews with native speakers in the Kapelekeshi, Kalembo, Ngulughulu and Kafule villages of the Songwe region in the southern highlands of Tanzania. Interviews were conducted with 20 participants obtained through purposive sampling technique until the point of saturation. The study is couched in the linguistic politeness theory by Penelope Brown and the interactional sociolinguistic theory by John Gumperz. The data were analysed using a thematic approach. The findings reveal that address terms are used as tools for overcoming face-threatening acts (FTAs) in Chindali conversation. FTAs are divided into positive politeness and negative politeness. Address terms, such as pronouns, titles, and honorifics, were noted as crucial tools in managing interpersonal relations and mitigating FTAs by offering avenues for politeness. The study recommends studies on address terms in other individual ethnic languages to come up with a reasonable understanding of how address terms mitigate face-threatening acts.

Keywords: Chindali, Conversation, Ethnic Language, Face-Threatening Acts

I. INTRODUCTION

Chindali is one of the ethnic community languages spoken by an increasing population of the Ndali people found in Ileje district, Songwe region in Tanzania. The Chindali language is also spoken in Northern Malawi (Botney, 1998). According to the census of 2022, Ileje district had a population of 125,869 distributed as 66,712 females and 59,157 males (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Chindali is a Bantu language branch of the Niger-Congo language family placed in zone M.30 Konde or Ngonde group (Kishindo, 1998; Lusekelo, 2021; Swilla, 2008; Swilla et al., 2001). Ileje is bordered to the North by Mbeya rural and Rungwe district and to the East by Kyela district. Ndali people live in an area that crosses the Tanzania-Malawi border (Kibona, 2019).

Language, as a primary tool of social interaction, plays a crucial role in managing face and mitigating face-threatening acts (henceforth FTAs). Face is a public self-image that everyone wants to claim for him or herself while FTAs refer to acts that challenge the desires or expectations of the person you are communicating with Brown and Levinson (1987). In addition, FTAs are those acts that by nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee or the speaker (Coupland, 2000). Goffman (1967) discusses face about how people present themselves in social situations and interactions. Lin (1935) argues that it is not a face that can be washed or shaved but a face that can be granted and lost, fought for and presented as a gift. Face is something that is emotionally invested in and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in an interaction.

The degree of potential face threat of any utterance is based upon the perceived social distance between the speaker and hearer, the power of the speaker in relation to the hearer and the imposition of the act (Ambuyo et al., 2011). Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that every utterance carries with it the potential to create a threat to either the speaker's or hearer's negative or positive face. This results in conflict, disruption, and aggression between interactants. Magashi (2017) asserts that if harmonious co-existence and effective communication miss among members of a society, that society is likely to fail to concentrate in different socio-economic activities and hence fail to attain sustainable development. Since we need to live better in harmonious situations, FTAs require a mitigating statement or some sort of politeness otherwise the line of communication will break; that is why politeness strategies are vital for dealing with

this (Ambuyo et al., 2011). Therefore, the findings of this paper reveal address terms as potential politeness strategies which can be utilized by interlocutors to reduce the effects of face threats to interacting parties in Ndali society.

FTAs tend to affect any language though not in the same way as they are a culturally specific phenomenon. What is considered polite in one culture could sometimes be quite rude or simply eccentric in another cultural context. In this sense, scholars need to study an individual language to be realistic about how a particular language is. Rwakakindo (2021) expresses that studying an individual speech community in isolation is much better for uncovering greeting patterns, address forms, and paralinguistic behaviours.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Politeness varies across cultures. This means that politeness reflects the way people interact and their social behavioral beliefs. In spite of cultural differences, the goal of politeness is to unite people by saving face, reducing conflicts, ensuring mutual communication, and showing respect (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Address terms are a common phenomenon across cultures, and they are significant in creating harmonious interaction. Thus, researchers point out that, to understand the correct conception and use of address terms, one should study them based on culture (Song, 2014). In this respect, a study on how address terms mitigate face-threatening acts in Chindali is vital for uncovering cultural differences in politeness among people in different societies. Therefore, this study will investigate the functions of address terms in Chindali conversation.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Identify the address terms used in Chindali conversation.
- ii. Explore how address terms function as politeness strategies in Chindali conversation.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on qualitative research design for its capacity to give the researcher room to provide in-depth information in their findings. The data were collected by participant observation and interview with native speakers. Interviews were conducted with 20 participants obtained through purposive sampling technique until the point of saturation. Thematic analysis and critical conversational analysis were employed in data analysis. The words, phrases, and sentences in Chindali were translated into English using the critical conversation method. This helped to obtain their meanings and study the internal structure of words by identifying morphemes. Thematic analysis identifies, organizes, and interprets patterns of meaning. Finally, the data were interpreted and discussed in relation to the objectives.

III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Response Rate

It was revealed that terms of address do not only express politeness in the context where face-threatening acts are projected; rather, they are for the sake of smooth interaction. In other words, address terms are not necessarily used to reduce FTAs in Chindali, but they can show respect and friendliness on their own. It was revealed that politeness features associated with address terms are important at the onset of conversations. The next subsections present the address terms revealed from this study that express politeness in the Ndali society.

3.1.1 Use of the titles *Mwene* 'chief' and *Songo* 'boss'

Ndali speakers use titles to mitigate FTAs in conversation, like the use of *Mwene* 'chief' that denotatively means a leader or ruler of people or a clan. This study revealed that Chindali has the terms *mwene* 'chief' and *songo* 'sir or boss' which are used to address all men though the word *mwene* can be used to address the leader depending on the context of use. These terms are used to avoid mentioning leaders' names. In Chindali, the terms *mwene* and *songo* are used in a direct address to politely refer to all males. However, young men cannot use this term when addressing adults and old people. The term *mwene* 'chief' or *songo* 'sir or boss' are always used by speakers of the same class, like age mates, close friends and people with similar power or economic status. If a young male uses it to address someone, it implies that the speaker and addressee are on the same level in terms of age or any other class. And if they are not on the same level, such an address will sound strange. But exceptions exist for an old man who can use the term *mwene* or *songo* addressing a young male if he wants to bring him more closely in interaction. For example, the following conversation between two men aged 60s proves this argument:

Extract 1

A: ghwe songo: na-ghenda ngani kwako
2SG-big-1SG-visit-PAST-DEG-POSS

'Boss, I have visited you several times.'

B: ku-ti-ki mwene:

1SG-do-what-say-chief

'What do you say chief?'

A: Ghwe ndi nu bhutolwe bhumo sebho

2SG-friend-1SG-POS-problem-friend

'I have a certain problem, my friend'

B: ha:::: teshu nanda ukutila

Ha:-1SG-fear-started

'I am getting afraid.'

A: ama: manye utilaghe jhugha ashe

NO: 2SG-be-afraid-speak

'No:: do not be afraid; speak.'

In the conversation, a man was telling his fellow: "*mwene, ghwaghenda*" 'how was the journey?' Replied, *naghenda songo*" 'It was good boss.' This conversation took place when they met after a week.

This observation was followed by an interview which started by a scenario of two men who met after a week. The informant was then asked to explain why the speaker addressed another using the terms *mwene* 'chief' and *songo* 'boss.' The interviewee replied,

"linga ghwamukolela umundu 'mwene' au 'songo' bho ghwamwimika leka" 'If you call a person chief it means you have highly respected.'

Another interview was conducted intending to gather views from Ndali speakers about the usage of *mwene* 'chief' or *songo* 'sir or boss.' A man in his 50s was given a question on why the two men address each other with the term *mwene* 'chief' or *songo* 'sir or boss' instead of their real names. The man replied:

"linga ghwamukolela umundu ingamu jhake jhikubha kawaida ashe lola linga ghwamuitisha ghwati songo au mwene akwipulika kisa papo ghwamwimika, na linga uli nu bhutolwe abhaghile ukukutula" 'if you call a person by name, it becomes normal, but it makes one feel respected if you call by using chief or sir, and it is easy to be helped.'

Therefore, the address terms *mwene* 'chief' and *songo* 'sir or boss' are not only used as address terms for males but also as a politeness strategy in Chindali conversation. The use of titles such as *mwene* ('chief') and *songo* ('boss') mitigates FTAs by avoiding direct mention of leaders' names and by symbolically elevating the addressee's social standing. These findings confirm Akindele's (2008) assertion that inappropriate address terms hinder effective communication, and they align with Agbaglo (2017) and Wahyuni (2018), who argue that social standing, age, and gender influence address term choice. Similarly, Praytno (2017) as well as Sommer and Lupapula (2012) highlight address terms as cultural products that signal politeness. Thus, in Chindali, address terms reinforce solidarity while diffusing potential threats in conversation.

3.1.2 Tatafyala or Majhifyala 'Father-in-Law or Mother-in-Law'

The terms *tatafyala* 'father-in-law' and *majhifyala* 'mother-in-law' are used to mean one's spouse parents. These terms are used to refer to both male and female parents of both sides. These terms carry the meaning of 'the highest level of respect' when used in direct address. In Chindali, a girl who has just been married is not allowed to talk to her mother-in-law and father-in-law until she is given some money from these two parents. After being paid the money; she will be free to talk to her mother-in-law but not to her father-in-law. If there is a need to talk to her father-in-law, then she will talk while kneeling far and avoiding eye contact. In Chindali, one's mother-in-law is more respected than one's own mother. This respect is normally evident through greetings and address terms.

The data from observation demonstrates how the term *majhifyala* 'mother-in-law' or *tatafyala* 'father-in-law' expresses politeness in Chindali conversation. On one occasion, a man aged 40 at his home saw his mother-in-law coming with his wife from the church. The man approached them to greet his mother-in-law. In greeting, the man began by calling *majhifyala*, 'mother-in-law', *mwaghona* 'good afternoon.' His mother-in-law replied, "*mwaghona bhabha, mwalamusha*" (while kneeling) 'good afternoon father, how are you doing.' Though the mother-in-law is older than the son-in-law, she knelt when greeting her son-in-law just because her daughter has married him. This means that the bride price initiated the respect. A man who has paid bride price is highly respected because they cannot forget what he paid to marry their daughter. Paying the bride price is very important in the Ndali community because it connects the two sides of the marriage. Those who have not paid the bride price are not respected because they are not counted as relatives since the only thing which connects the two has not been done.

Furthermore, the term *Kajhemba* is used to address parents of both sides to whom the children have married. *Kajhemba* is used to refer to both male and female parents. This conveys the meaning of 'the highest level of respect that cannot be conveyed to any relative.' The term *Kajhemba* is an in group identity marker which unites the two married

sides. This is illustrated using data from observation. On one occasion, a woman in her 50s was heard telling her neighbour that:

“ghwe muli, unyashimepo ulunyasi lumo nfililighwe nu kajhembra mwisoko” ‘please borrow me one carpet, my daughter’s mother-in-law has passed away.’

This observation led to an interview where a man aged 60 was given a scenario of a woman who mentioned the dead person ‘*kajhembra*’ instead of a personal name. The interviewee was asked to explain the reasons for the woman to do so. The interviewee responded that:

“utabhaghile pakumwitisha ukajhembra ghwako ingamu jhake papo mwajha bhukamu sona kumwimika. Umenye mwimwitu muno ingamu jha mundu jhita ni heshima sona paki ijha chikolo, jhope lazima ubhike ilya kajhembra pakunangisha mwo mubhelile.”

You cannot address the mother of your daughter’s husband by her name because it is a contempt. Then you should not mention her real name because you will sound rude. You can at least use a clan name but go together with the word *kajhembra* which shows your relationship and respect.’

Based on the discussions above, it can be generalized that the terms *majhifyala* ‘mother-in-law’ and *tatafyala* ‘father-in-law’ plus *kajhembra* ‘father or mother of the married child’ are strategies that express politeness in Ndali culture. These terms contain politeness features when used to address someone, and thus the addressed person is put close when these address terms are employed. In Ndali culture it is taboo for a son-in-law to mention the first name of his mother-in-law as it is for a daughter to her father-in-law. If a woman has a son named by the first name of her father-in-law and a daughter named by the name of her mother-in-law, she is not allowed to mention those names when addressing her son and her daughter, instead, another name will be created, if possible, in relation to the meaning of the name which is prohibited. For example, if a daughter is called Sindano then she can be called by using its connotative meaning name like ‘instrument used by tailors.’ These practices parallel Magashi’s (2017) findings among the Sukuma, where in-law names are taboo, and they resonate with Ahmed & Ghaffori (2019) and Akindele (2008), who emphasize cultural variation in eye contact and deference. Such findings confirm that Ndali kinship terms function as politeness strategies that preserve harmony and uphold social hierarchy.

“Bha:bha” ‘father’ and “ma:jhi” ‘mother’

Technically, the word *bha:bha* ‘father’ refers to a male parent and the word *majhi* ‘mother’ refers to a female parent. When these terms carry these meanings, they are usually used in both direct and indirect addresses. However, the term *bha:bha* ‘father’ is also used in a direct address to politely refer to all males regardless of their ages or ethnicities. For example, if a native speaker of Chindali meets any male, the appropriate address term to be used is *bha:bha* ‘father’, and if he or she meets a female, the appropriate address term to be used is *majhi* ‘mother.’ In this context, the addressee will respond “*une bhabha*” if the speaker is a male or *une majhi* if the speaker is a female. When this aspect is not taken into consideration during interaction, problems may arise, and communication may break down. Any male or female person can be called father or mother respectively regardless of the age of the interlocutors. This is proved in the next conversation:

Extract 2

C: ghwe: majhi: nabhwela
3SG-mother-1SG-PRES-go
‘You mother, I am going.’
F: ena bhabha: ↑ti tukomane
Thank-3SG-father-1PL-FUT-MEET
‘Thank you, father. We will meet.’

C refers to F as *majhi* in the conversation above, even though she is not his biological mother. Because that woman resembles his biological mother, C used this term to express his respect for her. Furthermore, F responded, *ena bhabha* ‘thank you father’, to show respect for C, who is younger than the lady. In Chindali conversations, it is customary to refer to children as their father or mother to give them the sense of importance they deserve in society, as they will be the fathers and mothers of tomorrow. This was noticed on multiple occasions when parents were speaking to their kids. This is an illustration of a dialogue between a mother and daughter:

Extract 3

A: Ghwa-semba majhi
You-PERF-fetch-mother
‘Have you fetched water, mother.’
B: Na-semba
1SG-PERF-fetched

'I have fetched.'

A: Tesha ghwa-kabhila

Why-PERF-2SL-come-late

'Why have you come late?'

B: Ghwe majhi::, ngwile na mishi

2SG-mother-1SG-fall-PREP-water

'You mother, I have fallen with water.'

A: U-majhi::: ghwa pona

POSS-mother, 3SG-PRES-safe

'My mother! Are you safe?'

B: Na-pona majhi

1SG-PRES-safe-mother

'I am a safe mother.'

In exchange, speaker A, a mother, refers to speaker B as her mother, and speaker B, a daughter, likewise addresses her mother as *majhi* 'mother.' This demonstrates the connotative and denotative uses of the term "mother" among Ndali people. This means that a daughter can be called *majhi* because she is expected to be a mother in days to come. Calling her this way imparts the sense of a responsible tomorrow's mother.

The above observation was followed by a follow-up interview where the researcher wanted to know the reasons for a Ndali's mother and daughter addressing each other, mother. To explore the views of a person in his 40s, the interviewee was given the scenario that the researcher observed. The researcher asked, why does a mother call her daughter mother? The respondent replied:

"Tukujhugha bhuhwwo papo jhula mukolo ghwi majhi. Linga ali mulisha kuti Bhabha. Iii ghwejho ghwi Bhabha ghwako ningelo. Kwagha ghwepe akuhobhoka, ghwamupala.' 'We address that way because she is a female. If she was a boy, she could be addressed as a father. Yes, that is your father tomorrow. He becomes very happy as you have praised him'".

Based on the above observation and interview, it can be concluded that the terms father and mother in Chindali have three main meanings. The first meaning is when a mother or a father is biological, second is when a speaker calls a father or mother from where she or he was born. The second meaning is when the term is addressed to any elder, male or female, who can be compared to the speaker's parents. And the third is when these terms are used to address young people to encourage them to behave confidently as tomorrow's parents. However, a father as a leader of the family is more respected than all in Chindali, as he is the head of the family. These findings echo Khairas (2022), who note that paternal titles often denote authority and respect. They also support Brown & Levinson's (1987) framework, where positive politeness strategies create closeness, while negative politeness enforces respect. Hence, parental address terms in Chindali reveal both relational solidarity and hierarchical acknowledgment.

Mulamu 'sister-in-law' mukojhi 'brother-in-law

Mulamu is used in Chindali to mean one's brother's wife and *Mukojhi* 'one's sister's husband.' These terms are used when one wishes to refer to either one's brother's wife or one's sister's husband respectively. The term *Mulamu* 'sister-in-law' or *Mukojhi* brother-in-law' contains politeness features; that is, they carry a special meaning of respect initiated by a marriage relationship. The terms are also used to address both females and males in Chindali conversations. This is illustrated by the next extract.

Extract 4

C: bha-li-nasho?

3PL-have- money

'They have money.'

A: bhishile na maghali::ghali ghene eshe

3PL-came-with-cars-many

'They came with many cars.'

B: i-ghali limo endeshagha umukojhi ghwa bibi arusi, ilingi endeshagha umulamu

ghwake::ghalikwo mingi ishe:

One-car-PAST-drive-PREP-bridge-PREP-brother-in-law-another-PAST-drive-

PREP-POSS-bridge-sister-in-law. There-PAST-many-cars.

'One car has been driven by brother-in-law another by sister-in-law, they had many cars.'

C: ama-ghali gha-bho? Pamu bha-shimite

3SG-Car-own-may-be-3PL-have borrowed

'Are cars theirs? Perhaps they have borrowed.'

In the extract 4, A says that “*ighali limo endeshagha umukojhi ghwa bibi arusi, ilingi endeshagha umulamu ghwake*” ‘one car was driven by her brother-in-law and another was driven by her sister-in-law.’ The researcher interviewed a person in 50s of age to get information on why speaker B uses the words ‘*mukojhi*’ and ‘*mulamu*’ instead of the personal names. The woman replied:

“*ilishu mukojhi and mulamu ghabhonesha pakuti kumwimika umundu sona ghabhonesha ubhukamu bhwa bhandu bho mukubhahughu. Ajhughite ulyo pakubhimika*” ‘*the word brother-in-law and sister-in-law are used to show respect and the relationship of the spoken people. She addressed that way to show respect.*’

The same question was asked to a woman in her 70s, who replied:

“*twe bhandali tutakukolela mwalwe ngamu sha bhandu hasa kubhukamu bhwa kilisha kwo mubhapile umukolo jhita heshima*” ‘*Ndali people do not address by personal names, especially to the people who have married your daughter. That is not respect.*’

The researcher noted the conversation which included the words *mulamu* and *majhi* as follows:

Extract 5

A: Mwandaghe mulamu

3PL-welcome-sister-in-law

‘Welcome sister-in-law.’

B: Ena majhi

Thank-3SG-mother

‘Thank you, mother.’

A: ghwa-ghenda

3SG-PERF-walk

‘Have you walked?’

B: Na-ghenda mulamu

1SL-PERF-walked-sister-in-law

‘I have walked, sister-in-law.’

In this conversation, A was addressing the guest who was just arriving by the term “*mulamu*” ‘sister-in-law’ while guest B addressed using the term *majhi* and sometimes *mulamu*. An informant aged 50s was asked why such address terms were used. The response was:

“*icho chilimwo mu Chindali umulamu ghwako, umukashi ghwa Mulumbu ghwako ghwi majhi ghwako. Linga umajhi ghwako lumo afwile ghwejho akwegha ichilongo*” ‘That is our culture in Chindali. Your sister-in-law who has married your brother is your mother. If let's say your mother has passed away; she takes the position.’

The discussion indicates that the term *majhi* is not reciprocal because it is particularly directed to one's brother's wife and not to the brother's sister while the term *mulamu* is reciprocal to the sisters-in-law from both sides. In Ndali culture, when the mother is absent, her son's wife will stand on behalf of the mother. The mother is more esteemed than a sister-in-law. The term *majhi* conveys a higher level of respect than the word *mulamu*. Supporting the observation in Chindali, Agbaglo (2017) and Wahyuni (2018) claim that the use of address terms is dynamic and constantly changes based on the occasion and context.

It can be put that the address terms *mulamu* ‘sister-in-law’ and *mukojhi* ‘brother-in-law’ are a result of marriage relationships. They are used with connotative meaning to signal a sense of respect in Chindali conversations. In this context, the address terms *mulamu* and *mukojhi* reflect cultural norms of respect and relational closeness when are used in place of personal names. For instance, sisters-in-law may address each other reciprocally with *mulamu*, while brothers-in-law receive reciprocal usage of *mukojhi*. However, the extension of *majhi* (‘mother’) to a brother's wife reflects hierarchical respect rather than reciprocity. These findings concur with Agbaglo (2017) and Wahyuni (2018), who emphasize contextual variation in address terms, and they align with Brown & Levinson's (1987) claim that in-group identity markers (like “dear” or “friend”) foster solidarity while reducing FTAs.

3.1.3 Chindali Clans' Attribute Names

Apart from address terms, the findings reveal that some names which are inherited according to the blood relation in the Ndali community are used to show respect. Besides the clan's name which is officially used, Ndali people have other clan's attribute names for females and males who have been born in the same blood. These names are not used in documents, but they are used in different community occasions when addressing each other. Every clan has a name which is used in official matters and other clan's names are addressed to the person of the same blood relation and not used in official matters. These names differentiate the history of one generation and another. Through these names, one can trace the history of a certain clan. For example, the names which go with the sir name *Kibona*, for males, are *Mjhafula*, *Kabhingu*, *Mbejhe*, *Chambo*, *Munyika*, *Kasanga*, and *Mwibhighwa*. These names have added a prefix ‘*na*’ to make a female name like *Nafula*, *Nakabhingu*, *Nambejhe*, *Nachambo*, *Nakasanga*, and *Namwibhighwa*. The name

Mjhafula means ‘of rain’ and *Kabhingu* means ‘of cloud.’ These names were given to the clan of Kibona because it was the only clan in Chindali that could cause rain. They put water into the pot and started praying. When praying, the water was increasing in the form of vapour in a pot and later came to be a cloud, followed by rain. Due to this action, these people were given the names associated with rain. Additionally, the name *Mbejhe* means ‘Mbeya’ or *Nambejhe* ‘of Mbeya’ was given because it is said that this clan originated from Mount Mbeya, which is in the Northwest of Mbeya city in Mbeya region.

Table 1

The table shows the observed Chindali attribute names given to the person following the line of blood

s/n	Clan name	Gender	Other names
1.	Kibona	Male	Mjhafula, Chambo, Kabhingu, Munyika, Mbejhe, Kasanga,
		Female	Nafula, Nachambo, Nakabhingu, Nambejhe, Nakasanga
2.	Mtafya	Male	Chelwa, Chonganya, Masalo, Kapina, Mungondya
		Female	Nachelwa, nachonganya, Namwila, Namasalo
3.	Msokwa	Male	Lukeshi, Mungondya, Kaseghe, Kukwe,
		Female	Nakamu, Kaseghe, Mungondya, Nakukwe
4	Msukwa	Male	Mulambya, Seghele, Ngunje, Ngajhi
		Female	Nangunje, Nangajhi, Naseghele
5	Mulungu Ndimbwa	Male	Kashimba, Mubheta, Nachileka
		Female	Nakashimba, Nachileka, Mubheta
6	Musomba	Male	Kaleshi, Mumbo, Mwibha, Mbala, Mulambya
		Female	Nakaleshi, Namwibha, Nambala, Namumbo
7	Chisunga	Male	Kubhali, Mwibha, Musila, Mujhungwe
		Female	Nakubhali, Namujhungwa, Namwibha

The observation was followed by follow-up interviews. An informant aged 60s and later a woman aged 50s were asked to give reasons why those praising names are used. Then, they were asked who was calling those names and explained the reasons for using those names. The man replied:

“Bhakukolela ngani abhakolo utwe twebhalisha aaa, tutakukolela asho. Bhakukolela ingamu isho pakumwimika umundu nu kuti umumenye leka.”

The names are mostly addressed by women; men do not use them. They call these names to show respect, to put someone close, and to discriminate themselves from other clans. On her side, the woman responded

“Ingamu ishi twashaghte ukufuma mababu na mababu, Shilikwo shimo shikubhonesha kwo mwafule kwali na koni. Isa une ne namikwese. Papo kukwabho kukabha ni mipiki mikulu ngani. Bhakuitisha ngani abhakolo papo bhobho bhakupimba ulufukwe nu kupapa. Bhamenye ubhutolwe bhwa kupapa. Bhakukolela ingamu ishi pakubhabhika abhana pipi nabho bhipulike kisa.”

‘We found these names from ancestors. Some of them show where the clan originated. For example, I am called *Namikwese* because the place had very big trees.’ It was explained by a woman that women call these names because they conceive and give birth, so they know how painful it is to get a child. By using these names, they try to embrace their children so that they can feel close to their mother.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that the clan’s attribute names are linguistic politeness strategies in Chindali. These attribute names signal respect, identity, and historical belonging, thereby strengthening community ties. The findings are consistent with Hwang (1991), who contrasted American first-name orientation with Korean title orientation, showing that name practices reflect deep cultural values

The term “sebho” ‘friend’ and “mulindu” ‘friend’

The findings reveal that the Ndali people use the terms of address *sebho* ‘friend’ and *mulindu* ‘friend’ in their conversations. The terms *sebho* and *mulindu*, are usually abbreviated as *se* and *muli* respectively and technically means ‘friend’ in Chindali conversations. The term *sebho* or *se* is used by male age mates only, and *mulindu* or *muli* is used by female age mates only. With this usage, address terms are usually used as a strategy to mitigate FTAs in conversation. The next extract illustrates this argument:

Extract 6

A: ghwapijha muli

2SG-thank-friend

‘Thank you, friend.’

C: napijha aki muli::: tukwenda ashe.

1SG-cook-what-friend-2PL-walking-just

‘What have I cooked friend. We are just walking.’

From Extract 6, A is acknowledging the gift brought by C. In her words, A uses the word *muli* ‘friend’ to show the close relationship existing between them. C also replies by including the word *muli* to agree with A about their closeness. The term *sebho* is revealed in the next extract to show how this is used in the conversation.

Extract 7

A: umwe nu mukulu ghwinyu ghwa chipanga muta na mahala

2PL-COORD-elder leader-3PL- are empty slate

‘You and the religious leader are empty slate.’

B: ogho sebho: ghwe uli-na-mahala leka

Okay-friend-2SG-3SG-DEG-clever

‘Okay, friend you are very clever.’

A: i:::ndakoline numwe. Umundu jhumo-jhwene ghwejho: akolite bho

1SG-NEG-same-3PL-ART-person-one-REL-3SG-listen-all

‘I am not the same as you. We all listen to one person.’

C: a:: po ghashila sebho

Aaa-lets-end-friend

‘Aaaa let’s end friend.’

B: i::: gha-shila mundu

Yes-3SG-PERF-ended-friend

‘Yes, they have ended friend.’

In addition, C and B address each other *sebho* in in the conversation. Their conversation shows that they were arguing about their thinking capacity. A considers his fellows and the religious leader as empty slates. B replied, “Okay, friend, you are very clever”. In this conversation, the word friend neutralizes the situation by putting the interlocutors close despite the variation in arguments noted in the topic being discussed.

The next conversation shows how the word *sebho* or *se* is used.

Extract 8

A: Ughwe se ghwa ghenda

2SG-friend-how was the journey

‘You friend, how was the journey.’

B: Na-ghenda sebho

was-good-dear

‘It was good dear.’

A: Utwa ukwo

How-PAST-journey

‘How was the journey?’

B: Ama twisa ashe se

3SG-PAST-good-friend

‘It was good, friend.’

The afore-mentioned conversation revealed the use of *sebho* or *se* as a word which puts two people close in the Ndali community. The term embraces two speakers who were separated for a long time. The speakers feel happy according to the freedom prevailing in their conversation. The address term *sebho* or *se* is reciprocally used and gives freedom to speakers who wish to use it.

Then, an interview was conducted to explore why these people used the word *sebho* or *se* in their conversation. Speaker A said that,

“*Nahobhokite leka bho ngumubhona umumanyani ghwangu ujhu atalipo patali leka. Nati sebho pakuti nhobhokite sona ngumwimika*”

‘I was very happy when I saw my friend who was absent for a long time. I used the word *sebho* to show my happiness and respect because B is very important to me.’

The words *sebho* and *muli* are used in accordance to sex, male and female respectively. The terms *sebho* (‘friend’ for males) and *mulindu* (‘friend’ for females) serve as strong positive politeness strategies. Their reciprocal use creates solidarity, minimizes distance, and neutralizes potential conflict. For instance, in arguments, the insertion of *sebho* or *muli* helped to diffuse tension and reaffirm closeness. This resonates with Ackermann (2023) and Aijmer & Andersen (2011), who argue that reciprocal address forms reinforce social equality. Similarly, Brown & Levinson (1987) classify such in-group markers as devices for reducing imposition and expressing friendliness.

First Names or Given Names

The findings of this study reveal that the first or given name is an address term that is usually used by members of the family, close friends, and relatives. There are some community conventions on how these names are used. The restrictions are caused by the social distance of the interlocutors. The evidence is seen from the following extract taken from a naturally occurring conversation, and it is an exchange between a father and his son.

Extract 9

B: ghwe: Lamsi:::: Lamsi:::

3SL-Lamsi-Lamsi

‘You Lamsi, Lamsi.’

E: une panu: ↑ bhabha::

1SG- AUX-here-father

‘I am here, father.’

B: keghe: i-chinanda: kwa Ndwele.

1SG-go- bring-ART-piano-PREP-Ndwele

‘Go to bring a piano from Ndwele.’

In Extract 9, B, who is the father of E, is calling his son, E, by using the first name. E responds by saying ‘I am here father.’ These findings reveal how address terms are used when the interlocutors are of different ages. Another example is when B who is the elder is addressing his son using the first name. In Chindali conversation, a young person cannot address the older person by using the first name. But they can use the address forms like father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, and grandfather regardless of the blood relationship. According to Lusekelo (2021), siblings may refer to one another using personal names in Nyakyusa. This may involve siblings from one family or any other extended family. But general kinship terms of *ukaka* ‘brother’, *udada* ‘sister’ and *ubinamu* ‘cousin’ may be used.

The researcher observed a woman calling her children who were outside by using one first name to address all the children. When she said, *"umwe↑bho Kisha isagha pakulya"* ‘You Kisha, come to eat.’ Here, she was addressing her child Kisha and her friends using her daughter’s first name attached with the second personal plural “you” which, in this context, means “all”. Older people can address young people by first names, but not vice versa. When the respondents were asked why children cannot address the elders using their first names, a woman in her 50s replied:

“Umwana umukeke atabhaghile ukukolela ingamu jhako. Luta lwigho. Lole usongo ghwejho akukukolela abhakeke. Pope linga mukoline mubhaghile ukukolelana lole shilipo isha chikolo shosho tukwitana ngani”

‘The younger generation cannot address the elderly by their first names. It is not customary for us to do that. Youth can be called by the elders. Although the clan’s name is most used, age-mates might address each other by their first names.’

The findings show that first names in Chindali are reserved for young people, close friends, and kin, while their use toward elders is culturally prohibited. Elders typically address the youth by first names, but the reverse is considered disrespectful. This restriction reflects politeness norms that preserve hierarchy. These observations align with Lusekelo (2021), who notes that Nyakyusa siblings may use first names, but kinship terms prevail in wider contexts. Likewise, Aijmer & Andersen (2011) and Sommer & Lupapula (2012) confirm that age, social status, and reciprocity govern address term choice across cultures. Such patterns are consistent with Mahmud’s (2019) findings that familiarity legitimizes first-name usage, while Özcan (2016) emphasizes that address terms embody semantic and pragmatic aspects of relationships.

IV. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

From the findings and discussions, it can generally be argued that address terms are very crucial in expressing politeness in Chindali conversation. This implies that the manipulation of different linguistic forms as address terms is not restricted to a few languages, but cuts across cultures and languages. However, as cultures vary from one another, the application and implication of address terms also vary. From the discussion, it is safe to argue that both negative and positive politeness strategies can be expressed using address terms in the Ndali community. Negative politeness strategies generally intend to show respect towards the addressee, and they are usually expressed through honorifics such as father, mother, father-in-law, mother-in-law, chief, and boss, and these are usually reciprocal. On the contrary, positive politeness is expressed through terms of endearment such as dear, love, and friend. Moreover, first names are usually used when the addressee and the speaker know each other well or when they are close friends.

4.2 Recommendations

This study focused on how address terms mitigate face threatening acts in Chindali conversations within the home domain. However, other domains such as churches, schools, workplaces, markets, funerals, and ceremonies also provide fertile ground for studying politeness. Future research should investigate these additional domains to broaden understanding and enrich contributions to the field of linguistic politeness.

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