

Application of politeness strategies in year naming practices: A case of the Ruhaya language in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Comprehending the applicability of politeness in the course of naming years broadens the linguists' grasp on the way the language is used in the social context. This study investigates politeness strategies employed in Ruhaya year-naming practices among the Bahaya communities of Tanzania. Year-naming in Ruhaya is a distinctive Bantu tradition that goes beyond timekeeping, reflecting the society's values and historical events. Despite its cultural significance, no prior research has investigated how politeness is encoded in Ruhaya's year names. To address this gap, the study identifies and analyses the linguistic strategies through which politeness is expressed in the Ruhaya year naming. Data were collected through documentary reviews and face-to-face interviews with 16 participants selected from the Ruhaya native speakers using a purposive sampling technique. The collected data were subsequently analysed using a thematic content analysis. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's linguistic politeness theory, the findings reveal four politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off-record strategies. Positive politeness came out as a predominantly employed strategy, occurring in 26 year names. This was followed by bald-on-record strategies with 15 year names, negative politeness with 14 year names, and off-record strategies with 13 year names. These findings demonstrate that Ruhaya year names are not assigned randomly; rather, their creation is influenced by polite communication within a specific social context. Additionally, the year names in the Ruhaya function not only as time indicators but also as culturally rooted practices that promote the Bahaya community cohesion. The study contributes to broadening the scope of politeness research in Bantu languages and thereby emphasising the importance of documenting indigenous naming systems that reflect unique cultural identities, like year naming. The study recommends further studies on the application of politeness strategies in other Bantu and non-Bantu languages' names, particularly personal names and year names, to come up with a plausible conception of politeness and naming.

Keywords: Bantu Culture, Bahaya, Politeness Strategies, Ruhaya, Tanzania, Year-Naming Practice

I. INTRODUCTION

Ruhaya is a Bantu language spoken by the Bahaya people in the Kagera region of mainland Tanzania (Buberwa, 2018). Guthrie (1971) classified Ruhaya in group JE22. Ruhaya belongs to the Niger-Congo language family and is more specifically classified within zone JE20, the "Haya-Jita group" (Maho, 2009). It is spoken by about 828,272 people in the Kagera Region in the districts of Bukoba Rural, Missenyi, Bukoba Urban and Muleba (Muzale & Rugemalira, 2008). Based on Muzale (2018), Ruhaya ranks as the sixth largest spoken language in Tanzania, following Swahili, Sukuma, Ha, Gogo, and Nyamwezi. It consists of five major dialects, namely, Runyaihngiro, Ruziba, Rubumbiro, Ruhyoza and Ruhamba. However, there are contradictions on the number of dialects found in Ruhaya; for instance, Rubanza (1988) and Muzale (2005) suggest eight dialects in Ruhaya related to the location of the former chiefdom, namely the Ziba dialect of the (Kiziba chiefdom), the Hamba dialect of the (Kianja chiefdom), the Hangiro dialect of the (Ihangiro chiefdom), the Nyakisaka dialect of the (Misenye chiefdom), the Yoza dialect of the (Kyamtwara chiefdom), the Endangabo dialect of the (Bugabo chiefdom), the Bumbira dialect of the (Bukara chiefdom) and the Mwani dialect of the (Karagwe chiefdom). In the recent study, we argue that Ruhaya has five dialects of Runyaihngiro, Ruziba, Rubumbiro, Ruhyoza and Ruhamba as proposed in Muzale (2018). Other dialects of Nyakisaka, Endangabo, and Bumbira could be regarded as sub-dialects of the major five dialects, as they are mutually intelligible and could not be extensively distinguished. Additionally, Muzale (*op.cit.*) notes that Ruhaya shares a significant degree of similarity with several languages, including Runyankore, Runyoro, Rukiga and Rutooro in Uganda as well as Ruzinza, Runyambo, Kikerewe and Kisubi in Tanzania.

The study of naming systems is a multidisciplinary field that has attracted the attention of philosophers of language, linguists and ordinary individuals across the world. Several scholars have delved into other angles related to naming in the world, as in Zawawi (1998), Rubanza (2000), Buberwa (2012, 2018), and Simon (2023a).

Zawawi (1998) conducted a study on African Muslim naming practices along the East African coast of Kenya and Tanzania. She argued that names are culturally and socially significant. Her study findings revealed that Arabic

linguistic forms, Islamic tradition, and local cultural adaptations shape Muslim names in East Africa. The names given to children regularly represent religious devotion, aspirations for moral character, or connections to revered figures within Islam. It is also highlighted that the given names reinforce identity when they are given and changed, serving as markers of faith, heritage, and communal belonging. These illustrations imply that African Muslim names, like Ruhaya personal names, are deeply embedded in sociocultural contexts. As far as the subject is concerned, the study points to the importance of examining Ruhaya year names, particularly in relation to politeness strategies, as another aspect of how naming decodes cultural values.

Rubanza (2000) examined personal names in Ruhaya and argued that they carried significant meaning. He observed that these meanings are often linked to family conflicts, friction, and circumstances surrounding birth. For instance, names such as *Rwekaza* 'one who fights oneself', *Byarugaba* 'God's blessings' and *Kajuna* 'helper' reflect personal and contextual associations with the individuals to whom they are assigned. However, the current study departs from Rubanza's focus by drawing attention to the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year-naming traditions.

Buberwa (2012) conducted a study on the sociolinguistic meanings of Bantu place names in Ruhaya. The study was based on the assumption that place names are not arbitrary markers; instead, they rely on specific socio-cultural phenomena. Her study findings revealed that Ruhaya place names derive their meanings from phenomena such as natural terrain, historical events, unique individuals, fauna, flora, cultivated crops, and activities carried out. For example, place names like *Mishenye* mean 'a lot of sand', *Omwizinga* means 'in the island', *Karugambwa* means 'a famous person who killed a buffalo', *Kyenjuba* means 'of hippopotamus', *Kisheka* means 'a big tree known as omusheka', *Kemyongu* means 'having pumpkins', and *Kyaitoke* means 'having bananas'. The study also demonstrated that the Ruhaya place names '*Kemyongu*' and '*Kyaitoke*' on crops raised were given based on the fact that they were cultivated in large quantities. However, the current study departs from Buberwa's focus on place names by examining the application of politeness in Ruhaya year naming practice, checking on how names encode harmony, respect and social solidarity among the Bahaya.

Buberwa (2018) also investigated names by focusing on sexism in Ruhaya personal name selection. The study disclosed that men names are more privileged than women's names. The study further disclosed that men's names were connected with fame, strength, wealth and leadership, presenting them as fighters '*Murashani*', saviours '*Mulokozi*', and providers '*Mugisha*' while women's names were associated with love and attraction, as in '*Kokunura*', and '*Kokugonza*', beauty, as in '*Karungi*', and comfort, as in *Kokumaramara* 'the one who consoles'. The present study takes a departure by investigating the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year names.

Okello (2021) examined the Luo naming system in Kenya's ethno-political landscape. He argued that Luo names, as in African names, are not taken for granted because they are socially and politically meaningful. The findings showed that urban contexts like Nairobi and Mombasa are reshaping Luo names to reflect identity, belonging, and ethno-political negotiation. Okello accentuated that naming practices are dynamic, adapting to social change and modernity while still retaining cultural significance. Therefore, Luo names, like Ruhaya personal names, are acutely embedded in socio-cultural contexts. In this regard, the study points to the importance of examining the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year names as another dimension of how naming encodes meaning.

Simon (2023b) investigated the factors determining the goat names in the Sukuma speech community of Tanzania mainland. He argued that goat names are socially meaningful. The study portrayed that goat names in Sukuma are influenced by factors such as behaviour, physical appearance, ownership, and economic values, to name but a few. For example, a goat might be named *Bhuyenze* 'having hairs like kernels of maize' or *Hinda* 'having two breast-like structures in its neck'. Based on colours, goats may be named *Matimyabhili* 'having only two symbolic colours' or *Wilongo/Ibhala* 'having a spot or strain'. These examples entail that goat names, like personal names, are deeply embedded in socio-cultural context. Nevertheless, this study points to the need for further investigation on Ruhaya year names, specifically in relation to the application of politeness strategies.

Building on this observation, the present paper investigates politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming practices among the Bahaya communities in Tanzania. The year naming is a unique cultural phenomenon in which a year is assigned a name that reflects community values, historical events, and collective experiences. Beyond its role as a chronological time marker, year naming functions as a socio-cultural practice that represents politeness and reinforces community cohesion. Although previous scholars have examined Ruhaya in relation to grammar, semantics, and morphology, and other linguistic aspects (Byarushengo et al., 1977; Rubanza, 1988,1995, 2000; Muzale, 2005,2018; Buberwa, 2012, 2018; Riedel, 2010; Sommer & Lupapula, 2012; Mujuni & Cornelli, 2024), little attention has been devoted to the politeness strategies embedded in year naming. This study therefore seeks to address that gap by examining how politeness is linguistically expressed in Ruhaya year names, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of sociolinguistic practices in Bantu languages that reflect distinctive cultural identity.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The year naming in Ruhaya is a fascinating practice among the Bahaya community in Tanzania. It is a unique tradition that goes beyond the practice of naming people, animals and objects. Although Ruhaya has received attention in aspects like grammar, morphology and semantics, little has been dedicated to politeness strategies employed in year naming. The absence of the study on politeness in calling year names may deny the linguists and the Bahaya community at large the ability to preserve the distinctive culture and knowledge of naming years. Therefore, this study sounds crucial, as it extends the application of politeness in Bantu languages and the naming systems that are unique. So, this study instigates the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming that safeguard the decline of the oral and written traditions in the Bahaya community.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Identify the linguistic strategies through which politeness is expressed in the Ruhaya year naming.
- ii. Analyse the linguistic strategies through which politeness is expressed in the Ruhaya year naming.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Brown and Levinson's linguistic politeness theory. Two sociolinguists, Brown and Levinson (1978), proposed a theory based on the notion of face, which they later refined in (1987). The theory is regarded as the most influential theory in analysing politeness in language (Sadeghohli & Niroomand, 2016). Drawing on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, the theory conceptualises politeness as a communicative strategy used to manage social relations and mitigate face threatening acts. Within this framework, individuals orient toward two types of face wants: a positive face seeks approval and acceptance, and a negative face seeks freedom from imposition. Brown and Levinson identify four major strategies that speakers employ depending on contextual demands: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record. This typology offers a lens for examining how Ruhaya year naming practices encode politeness through linguistic and cultural choices, making it pertinent for analysing year names.

Although other naming theories, such as Nickname Theory (Skipper & Leslie, 1988; Skipper & Leslie et al., 1990) and the Mediated Reference or Descriptive Theory, provide valuable insights into naming practices, they are not the guiding frameworks in this study. The Nickname theory emphasises the contextual and situational properties of names, showing how meanings are negotiated through social conventions and shared understanding. Mediated reference, or Descriptive theory, highlights the descriptive and referential functions of naming, so explaining how names act as cultural descriptors that mediate between events and communal interpretation. These perspectives are recognised as part of large discussion about naming systems, but Brown and Levinson's theory is selected as the essential framework because it specifically focuses on politeness strategies in communicative acts. This directly aligns with the study's aim of analysing how politeness strategy is manifested in Ruhaya year names, so it makes it the most suitable theoretical framework.

Despite Brown and Levinson's theory strengths, it has limitations that have to be known. Its claim to universality has been critiqued for privileging Western models of interaction, which may not fully capture the communal, culturally entrenched nature of African naming systems. The framework tends to emphasise interactions between speaker and hearer, whereas the Ruhaya year naming reflects collective memory and communal evaluation rather than individual interaction alone. Furthermore, the four strategies, while analytically useful, may oversimplify culturally specific strategies that surface in indigenous naming practices. By acknowledging these weaknesses, the study applies Brown and Levinson's theory with cultural sensitivity, using it as a heuristic tool to categorise politeness strategies while remaining attentive to the socio historical and communal dimensions of Ruhaya year naming.

Referring to Magashi (2023), Brown and Levinson summarised human politeness behaviour into four politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald on record strategy. She further argues that specific circumstances and purposes dictate the application of these set strategies. Thus, the politeness strategies used in Ruhaya year-naming practices are based on a reflective process that considers the past community experiences related to economic, political, and social situations of the previous year to the next. In this study, Brown and Levinson's linguistic politeness theory was used to identify and categorise the relevant politeness strategy that was applied in each Ruhaya year-naming practice from 1959 to 2026.

2.2 Empirical Review

Studies on linguistic politeness have predominantly examined how politeness is manifested through address terms, greetings, and honorifics (Agyekum, 2008; Wang, 2017; Marten & Kula, 2021; Rwakakindo, 2021; Bayo, 2023; Magashi, 2023). For instance, Wang (2017) investigated the linguistic politeness strategies employed by Chinese and American university students when making email requests to professors. The study aimed to explore how cultural

differences influence communication styles in academic settings, analysing emails using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which categorises politeness strategies into positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record. The findings revealed distinct differences: Chinese students tended to favour positive politeness strategies, often expressing gratitude and using deferential language to acknowledge social distance, while American students leaned toward bald-on-record strategies, using direct and efficient communication with minimal emphasis on politeness. While Wang's study focused on politeness strategies in the formal and institutional (university) contexts, they leave unexplored the ways in which politeness strategies are enacted in informal, culturally embedded practices. It is within this gap that the present study revisits politeness strategies in Tanzania's informal context of Ruhaya year-naming practices, an area that has received limited scholarly attention.

Agyekum (2008) conducted a study on greetings as a regular aspect of polite interaction, examining their functions, contexts, and major forms of the Ghanaian Akan. Methods such as ethno-pragmatics, ethno-semantics, introspection, participant observation, and interviews were employed. The study classified greetings based on formality, timing, and associated events and analysed them using frameworks such as the ethnography of communication, politeness theory, and speech act theory, all within the domain of anthropological linguistics. The findings revealed that greetings among Akans vary depending on context and the interlocutors, with incorrect usage often leading to diminished social impact. Akan greetings serve to strengthen social relationships, reduce anxiety, and build trust between individuals. A warm and reciprocated greeting fosters optimism in interpersonal interactions and reinforces politeness. While Agyekum's study focused on greetings in the Akan tribe, the present study focuses instead on the politeness strategies expressed through Ruhaya year names, which remain underexplored in the literature.

In the same area as greetings, Rwakakindo (2021) investigated the Kisubi greeting system, seeking to identify temporal greeting patterns and determine whether age and gender dictate verbal greetings, address forms, and paralinguistic behaviours. The study among other objectives sought to identify temporal greeting patterns in Kisubi and to determine whether age and gender dictate the kind of verbal greetings, address forms and paralinguistic behaviours that are used in particular greeting events. Observation and face-to-face interview methods were used to collect data from 36 participants who were obtained from snowball sampling techniques. Data were analysed through content analysis where different themes emerged. The findings revealed four temporal chunks in Kisubi (age, gender, contexts and kinship relations) relations that determined the type of greeting and the honorific terms used: however, the use of honorifics appears to be gradually declining. While the study by Rwakakindo dealt with the greetings system in Kisubi, the current study addresses politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming, broadening the scope of politeness research to a different Bantu language and cultural practices.

Marten and Kula (2021) explored ways of expressing politeness and respect in Bantu languages, drawing from the variation parameters in Guérois et al. (2017) and the Bantu Morphosyntactic Variation database (BMV) from Marten et al. (2018). Their study analysed 33 Bantu languages from central and southern regions and revealed that more than half (54%) of the examined languages use plural morphology for honorific marking, with the majority (30%) relying on second person plural forms. Other strategies included class 2 morphology, plural forms for singular reference, honorific titles, greetings, locative marking, and borrowing from language contact. While this study highlighted the grammatical and morphological encoding of politeness in Bantu languages, the present study does not deal with plural forms or honorific morphology but instead examines politeness strategies such as positive, negative, bald-on-record, and off-record in Ruhaya year naming practices.

Bayo (2023) examined address terms in the Iraqw speech community. The study dealt with four major categories of address terms employed among family members, relatives, non-family members, and strangers within the Iraqw community. Data were gathered through observations and interviews. The findings revealed that the choice of address terms was governed by social variables like age, status, sex and family relationships between the addresser and addressee. Failure to account for these variables jeopardises interpersonal relationships among the interlocutors and leads to significant communication barriers, hindering effective interaction and mutual understanding. While Bayo's study focused on address terms in Iraqw, the present study investigates politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming, thereby widening the analysis of politeness beyond interpersonal address to communal naming practices.

Similarly, Magashi (2023) examined the role of address terms in expressing politeness in social interaction in Sukuma. During the study, fourteen conversations were recorded, and seven cases were observed. The data was then transcribed and thematically analysed. The findings revealed that address terms play an important role in Sukuma. Positive politeness strategies were expressed through terms of endearment like dear, homey, friend and love, while negative politeness strategies were expressed through honorifics like mother, father, mother-in-law, father-in-law and village head. While Magashi's study concentrated on address terms in Sukuma, the present study focuses on politeness strategies used in naming years in Ruhaya, highlighting a different dimension of politeness expression. This suggests that politeness is not only evident in everyday linguistic practices such as greetings and honorifics, but it is also embedded in the naming of years, functioning as a cultural mechanism for maintaining harmony. However, apart from

this politeness related contribution, there is a scarcity in empirical literature on Ruhaya year-naming traditions, particularly in relation to how politeness is linguistically manifested.

The existing research on year naming practices remains limited, despite the literature review on how politeness is manifestation through address terms, greetings, and honorifics. Notably, there are few scholars globally whose studies have partly dealt with the year naming angle, leaving away politeness (Tapia, 2003; Kałużyńska, 2023; and Mujuni & Cornelli, 2024).

Tapia (2003) in the United States observed the cultural responses to the technological threat of the year 2000 dilemma, generally referred to as Y2K. During the study, content analysis and interviews were employed to observe three different subcultures, namely millennial Christians, computer professionals, and militia patriot survivalists, and the way they conceived meaning about Y2K in their own moral and social frameworks. The findings revealed that the Y2K was not just a forecasted software malfunction but a symbolic marker of collective worries, interpreted through narratives of prophecy, survival, and technological expertise. Although her study was Western oriented and does not directly address Ruhaya year-naming traditions, it provides a comparative dimension for understanding how communities change time markers into cultural signifiers. While Tapia's study focused on sub-cultural interpretations of the year 2000 (Y2K) in Western contexts, the present study focuses instead on the politeness strategies expressed through Ruhaya year names, which remain unexplored in literature.

Similarly, Kałużyńska (2023), in a different cultural context, studied the Chinese zodiac system as a cyclical framework for year naming. She portrayed that the zodiac system did structure the calendar and influenced personal naming traditions by linking identity to cosmological cycles. The Chinese zodiac system was entrenched in the heavenly bodies and earthly branches to assign every year a symbolic animal and its attributes in a repeating twelve year cycle. Historical studies like those tracing zodiac inscriptions in ancient Chinese further underline the role of year names in shaping cultural identity and continuity. Unlike Ruhaya year names, which are event based and encode communal experiences and moral lessons, Chinese zodiac year names are astrophysical and symbolic, accentuating destiny and attributes. So far, both traditions demonstrate how year naming functions as a cultural signifier, embedding collective values in time markers. The provided distinction study highlights the diversity of year naming practices globally and indicates that there must be further empirical work on politeness strategies in Ruhaya year names.

In Ruhaya's context, Mujuni and Cornelli (2024) examined the historical development and the moral significance of year naming among the Bahaya. Phenomenology and hermeneutics methodology were employed as methods for drawing the study's conclusion. The findings disclosed that the traditional practice of year naming is an important part of the Haya identity, as they are not only symbolic but also a source of preserving morality. They added that year names serve as collective records of social experience and moral assessment, and thus life in its fullness is evident. Despite the significance of politeness strategies in Ruhaya, the area of year-naming practices remains largely underexplored. This gap serves as a critical point of departure for revisiting politeness strategies within Ruhaya's year-naming. This study specifically investigated these strategies, contributing to a more profound understanding of the intersection between politeness and year-naming as a compelling sociolinguistic phenomenon that deserves further scholarly attention.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted an ethnographic research design to explore politeness strategies in Ruhaya year-naming practices within their natural socio-cultural context. Ethnography, rooted in anthropology and sociology, entails an in-depth study of cultural groups by examining their shared languages, behaviours, and practices in everyday settings (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Guided by this approach, it was important to be immersed in the Ruhaya-speaking community of Muleba District to gain a contextualised understanding of year naming as a cultural practice closely tied to communal values and social identity. This design enabled a holistic examination of how politeness strategies are embedded in the linguistic and cultural expressions of the community.

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in the Muleba District of the Kagera Region, Tanzania, with a particular focus on Ruhaya speakers from Muzinga and Kabare villages. The villages were selected because they were homes of communities of Ruhaya native speakers whose linguistic and cultural practices formed the basis of the study on the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming. Muleba District was established in 1984, and it lies along the western shores of Lake Victoria and is one of the eight districts that make up the Kagera Region. Administratively, the district is divided into five divisions and includes 43 wards and 166 villages with a population of 637,659, which increases by 3.4% annually (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2022).

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised native speakers of Ruhaya from Muzinga and Kabare Village in Muleba District, Kagera Region. According to the Languages of Tanzania Project (LOT) 2009, the estimated number of native Ruhaya speakers in Muleba District is 318,255, out of the total estimated population of 833,214 Ruhaya speakers. Therefore, the study focused on this subset of the population, as they represent the primary demographic group relevant to the investigation of the application of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year naming practices.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to select 16 participants who were from the middle-aged and elderly group. They were selected based on their deep familiarity with Ruhaya culture and their previous involvement in proposing year names. Six participants were drawn from Muzinga Village and ten from Kabare Village. The sample size of 16 participants was determined by the point of saturation where no new information emerged from additional participants. The sample-sized participants were regarded as custodians of community memory and traditions and were therefore well suited to explain the socio-cultural meanings associated with year-naming practices.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

To obtain rich and complementary data, the study employed two main techniques of data collection: documentary review and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Documentary sources included Rumuli newspapers and *Ikaningambo y'o Ruhaya: Ruhaya–English–Kiswahili Dictionary*, which provided a corpus of year names that were identified and examined for politeness strategies. Building on information gathered from these written records, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected informants using open-ended question guides. These interviews enabled participants to clarify, elaborate on, and contextualise the meanings of year names drawn from the documentary sources. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. The combined use of documentary and interview methods, as recommended by Leedy and Ormrod (2010), strengthened the study by bridging gaps between documented accounts and lived experiences.

3.6 Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the data, thematic content analysis was employed to interpret the findings. Year names obtained from both documentary and interview sources were systematically coded, categorised, and organised into recurring themes. The analysis revealed four dominant themes corresponding to Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies, which guided the interpretation of the socio-pragmatic functions of the names.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Throughout the research process, the researchers ensured that ethical principles were strictly observed. The study complied with the research values and ethical standards of the University of Dodoma, and ethical clearance together with an official research permit was secured prior to data collection. All the participants were informed of the study purpose and their role, and consent was obtained. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and respect for participants' autonomy were maintained, and audio recordings were used solely for research purposes. This transparency fostered trust and encouraged participants to share information openly about year names and their socio-cultural meanings.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

This study explores politeness strategies in Ruhaya year-naming practices through Brown and Levinson's linguistic politeness theory. The findings reveal that four linguistic strategies are employed to convey politeness within the context of Ruhaya year-naming practices, as presented and discussed in subsections below.

4.1.1 Positive Politeness Strategy in Ruhaya Year-Naming

According to Luthfi (2022), positive politeness is a rhetorical strategy used to build rapport with the addressee by expressing gratitude, approval, interest and familiarity. Positive politeness strategy is designed to redress the addressee's positive face. It involves seeking approval and connection. In the context of Ruhaya year-naming, the strategy fosters communal engagement within the Ruhaya speech community, reinforcing social cohesion and collective identity. Table 1 below presents the years named from the perspective of positive politeness strategies.

Table 1*Ruhaya Year-Names Associated with Positive Politeness Strategies (1959-2026)*

S/N	Year	Year-name in Ruhaya	English Gloss
1	1959	<i>Bilemolengile</i>	'Let it fail only after you have tried (try even if you fail)'
2	1960	<i>Ija Webonele</i>	'Come and see for yourself'
3	1967	<i>Teekana</i>	'Be peaceful (calm)'
4	1970	<i>Tweyambe</i>	'Let's be active (Let's support each other)'
5	1973	<i>Genderera</i>	'Continue'
6	1980	<i>Burur'obone</i>	'Open up and see (what's going on)'
7	1982	<i>Gshooko</i>	'Prosperity'
8	1983	<i>Shobokerwa</i>	'Understand'
9	1984	<i>Ikingura</i>	'Dawn maker (the one who opens the door for blessing)'
10	1986	<i>Shuubi</i>	'Hope'
11	1989	<i>Kwatiraho</i>	'Keep that way (Keep it up)'
12	1991	<i>Humura</i>	'Rest (Be at ease, calm down stop crying)'
13	1994	<i>Humbya</i>	'Pray for the best'
14	1995	<i>Guma</i>	'Be firm or don't worry'
15	1999	<i>Fukama</i>	'Bow (kneel to show respect)'
16	2000	<i>Shanduka</i>	'Rejoice (be happy)'
17	2001	<i>Shamula</i>	'Shed light on (enlighten)'
18	2004	<i>Shabuka</i>	'Get across'
19	2005	<i>Siima</i>	'Be grateful'
20	2007	<i>Tegeka</i>	'Discuss'
21	2012	<i>Wechonche</i>	'Be prepared (make all necessary preparation)'
22	2014	<i>Yeetohye</i>	'Be humble'
23	2017	<i>Yegashanize</i>	'Pray'
24	2021	<i>Bagara</i>	'Weed (take care of what you've established)'
25	2022	<i>Otagwisa Mukono</i>	'Don't give up'
26	2025	<i>Hiky'o Orubimbi</i>	'Complete a farming plot as a day's work'

Source: Muzale (2018) and Rumuli Newspapers

The findings about the manifestation of politeness strategies in Ruhaya year-naming practices indicate that positive politeness strategies were the most frequently employed. Specifically, out of the 68 year names examined, 26 were associated with positive politeness strategies (Table 1). There are year names in Ruhaya that uphold cooperation, resilience and individual development, so manifesting positive politeness strategies. Several names insist on perseverance, for instance, *Bilemolengile* '1959' and *Otagwisa Mukono* '2022', urging diligence despite challenges. Additionally, perseverance and cooperation appear in *Tweyambe* '1970', *Kwatiraho* '1989' and *Genderera* '1973', advocating mutual support and social continuity. The years named *Shuubi* '1986', *Yegashanize* '2017' and *Humbya* '1994' reinforce hope and optimism, highlighting prayers and determination among the Ruhaya speech community.

Intellectual engagement and self-awareness appear in *Ija Webonele* '1960', suggesting first-hand rather than second-hand information, *Burur'obone* '1980', *Shobokerwa* '1983' and *Shamula* '2001', encouraging awareness and enlightenment within the social context. Affective sense of balance is encouraged in *Guma* '1995' and *Humura* '1991', promoting confidence and calmness within the Haya community. The years named *Wechonche* '2012' and *Yeetohye* '2014' put emphasis on attentiveness and humility, thus underpinning social harmony. Gratitude and respect are central to *Siima* '2005', *Fukama* '1999', and *Tegeka* '2007', reinforcing appreciation, bowing, and deference discussion among the Ruhaya speech community.

Economic and agricultural subjects appear in *Bagara* '2021' and *Hiky'o Orubimbi* '2025', signalling care for established economic activities and diligent farming as well as other societal activity. *Gshooko* '1982' highlights prosperity, reinforcing social aspiration. *Ikingura* '1984' signals new beginnings in the society, whereas *Shanduka* '2000' and *Shabuka* '2004' instigate the social happiness and advancement. The year named *Teekana* '1967' further puts emphasis on harmony by advocating peace in the Ruhaya speech community. Concurrently, the 26 Ruhaya year names represent positive politeness strategy as a linguistic mechanism for reinforcing social values, fostering unity, and sustaining intergenerational motivation.

4.1.2 Bald on Record Strategy Use in Ruhaya Year-Naming Practices From 1959-2026

Interlocutors employ the bald on record politeness strategy to facilitate clear and effective communication within the society (Njuki & Ireri, 2021). On the other hand, Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that the bald on

record strategy comes into play when there is a need for urgency and emphasis. This strategy involves conveying messages in the most direct manner, without any attempt to acknowledge the addressee's face needs. The Ruhaya year names under the bald on record politeness strategy are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Ruhaya Year-Names Associated with Bald on Record Strategies (1959-2026)

S/N	Year	Year-name in Ruhaya	English Gloss
1	1962	<i>Gumisa Omwoyo</i>	'Be courageous'
2	1965	<i>Ndarweboine</i>	'I have had terrible experience'
3	1968	<i>Tabaro</i>	'Confrontational expedition with courage'
4	1969	<i>Nyikira</i>	'Be determined (persevere)'
5	1971	<i>Sisimuka</i>	'Wake up'
6	1978	<i>Shuliza</i>	'Go back to check for security'
7	1993	<i>Yombeka</i>	'Build'
8	1997	<i>Chwaziika</i>	'Put much effort (work with vigour , make yourself busy)'
9	1998	<i>Tekereza</i>	'Think'
10	2008	<i>Rashana</i>	'Fight (struggle)'
11	2009	<i>Jwahuka</i>	'Lose no time (hurry up)'
12	2016	<i>Yanguha</i>	'Be quick (hurry up)'
13	2020	<i>Kanyisa Emisiri</i>	'Increase farming areas for income'
14	2024	<i>Bandizaho</i>	'Begin from there (just begin and don't hesitate)'
15	2026	<i>Leka Kwechura</i>	'Stop being shocked'

Source: Muzale (2018) and Field Data

From table 2 above, it is evident that the year-naming in the Ruhaya tradition uses bald on record politeness strategies. The identified names are characterised by directness and urgency in communication. A number of names give emphasis to courage and determination, for instance, *Gumisa Omwoyo* '1962', urging resilience, and *Nyikira* '1969', amplifying perseverance. Moreover, *Tabaro* '1968' highlights bravery in facing challenges, while *Sisimuka* '1971' is a direct call to wake up and take action, urging the Haya members to stop acting helplessly. Similarly, *Rashana* '2008' and *Jwahuka* '2009' express necessity, demanding hurried action; *Yanguha* '2016' further emphasises the urgency of speed. In the same vein, *Leka Kwechura* '2026' continues the tradition of giving directives, calling upon the community to stop being shocked and to regain composure in order to move forward after the unsettling events of 2025 in Tanzania. The name exemplifies the bald on record strategy by directly addressing collective paralysis and urging immediate psychological adjustment.

The findings depict that some names focus on giving warnings, suggestions and decisiveness, for example, *Shuliza* '1978', instructing individuals to check for security as there was the Kagera war in Tanzania versus Uganda, and *Yombeka* '1993', suggesting building and stability. *Chwaziika* '1997' and *Tekereza* '1998' encourage industriousness and critical thinking, highlighting the value of effort in the Ruhaya speech community. *Kanyisa Emisiri* '2020' presents economic directives advocating the expansion of agricultural land to enhance income generation. Finally, *Bandizaho* '2024' does away with hesitation by promoting immediate action, while *Ndarweboine* '1965' directly puts across hardship through acknowledgement of personal experiences. Within this continuum, *Leka Kwechura* '2026' is situated as a decisive call to overcome shock and reinforcing the community's need to confront challenges with resilience and to avoid stagnation. The findings reveal that 15 year names in Ruhaya embody the bald on record politeness strategy, emphasising urgency, clarity and decisive action over indirectness and mitigation.

4.1.3 Negative Politeness Strategy in Ruhaya Year-Naming

Negative politeness refers to a communicative strategy intended to comfort the hearer's negative feelings about respectful conduct and avoid imposition (Luthfi, 2022). The negative politeness strategy is designed to redress the addressee's negative face. Several years are categorised under the negative politeness strategy, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3*Ruhaya Year-Names Associated with Negative Politeness Strategies (1959-2026)*

S/N	Year	Year-name in Ruhaya	English Gloss
1	1961	<i>Bilye Oyekomile</i>	'Eat but be prepared for anything'
2	1964	<i>Karamanshanyio</i>	'Resourceful endeavour or strive'
3	1966	<i>Babindangiire</i>	'I have heard the news'
4	1975	<i>Kakiweyo</i>	'Wait for the end'
5	1977	<i>Henjuza</i>	'Be meticulous'
6	1985	<i>Kankwehanuzeo</i>	'Let me seek your advice'
7	1990	<i>Hanulirwa</i>	'Take advice'
8	1996	<i>Yechuze</i>	'Regret'
9	2002	<i>Rundaana</i>	'Keep cool (be calm)'
10	2006	<i>Gil'emilembe</i>	'Have peace'
11	2010	<i>Chulela</i>	'Be calm (calm down)'
12	2011	<i>Tongana</i>	'Plead humbly for forgiveness'
13	2013	<i>Webange</i>	'Be on stand-by for duty (get prepared)'
14	2018	<i>Ganyira</i>	'Forgive'

Source: Muzale (2018) and Rumuli Newspapers

The findings show that the year-naming tradition in Ruhaya reflects negative politeness strategies that emphasise humility, caution, and indirect communication. Various names promoting respect and humility appear in *Kankwehanuzeo* '1985' and *Hanulirwa* '1990', which express deference by seeking advice rather than asserting one's own stance. The findings in Ruhaya year names also reflect preparation and patience, such as *Bilye Oyekomile* '1961', which recommends promptness for unpredicted circumstances, and *Kakiweyo* '1975', urging tolerance while awaiting a situation to fully disclose. The year name *Babindangiire* '1966' indicates detachment by acknowledging news without further engagement, while *Henjuza* '1977' underlines meticulous scrutiny. The year named *Yechuze* '1996' establishes an aspect of regret, signifying self-discipline, whereas *Rundaana* '2002', *Chulela* '2010', and *Gil'emilembe* '2006' put emphasis on calmness and peace, thus lessening confrontation in the Ruhaya speech community.

Negative politeness strategy was found in advocating forgiveness and social harmony as promoted in *Tongana* '2011', encouraging humble pleading for reconciliation, and *Ganyira* '2018', reinforcing the act of forgiving. On the other hand, the year name *Webange* '2013' instils preparedness for duties, subtly implying readiness to serve. *Karamanshanyio* '1964' gives much emphasis to resourcefulness, avoiding impulsiveness. The findings under the negative politeness strategy indicate that all 14 year names reflect indirectness, respect, and concern, attesting to minimal imposition while sustaining social stability.

4.1.4 Off-record Strategy Employed in Ruhaya Year-Naming Practices From 1959-2026

Njuki and Ireri (2021) define the off-record politeness strategy as a tactful use of indirect language that allows the speaker to mitigate imposition on the addressee. The strategy involves conveying an expression in a manner that absolves the speaker of direct accountability for its interpretation. Table 4 illustrates the year names in Ruhaya as part of the off-record politeness strategy.

Table 4*Ruhaya Year-Names Associated with Off-record Strategies (1959-2026)*

S/N	Year	Year-name in Ruhaya	English Gloss
1	1963	<i>Otula Obungya</i>	'You have been selling (but now you'll have to buy) meaning that it will not be easy any more'
2	1972	<i>Shaya</i>	'Put in more effort in doing something'
3	1974	<i>Wekebuke</i>	'Examine yourself'
4	1976	<i>Ija Balebe</i>	'An expression used to show surprise like (Oh my God)'
5	1979	<i>Tikiliwa Igamba</i>	'It will never stop being retold'
6	1981	<i>Galaziw'enzihi</i>	'It will be swarm by great swimmers (it'll be based on your effort)'
7	1987	<i>Wemoge</i>	'Criticise yourself'
8	1988	<i>Kakutantalikwa</i>	'Don't fool around'
9	1992	<i>Nyin'eiriwo</i>	'I am thirsty'
10	2003	<i>Webaze</i>	'Ask yourself'
11	2015	<i>Ijuka</i>	'Remember (recall)'
12	2019	<i>Biruga Omumpiita</i>	'It is from sweating (hard work)'
13	2023	<i>Ige'nshamba</i>	'Find a strategy (to rescue yourself)'

Source: Muzale (2018) and Rumuli Newspapers

The findings from table 4 above indicate that the Ruhaya year-naming tradition integrates off-record politeness strategies, in which meanings are implied rather than being stated directly, encouraging interpretation and self-reflection. The year names hint at challenges subtly, such as *Otula Obungya* '1963', which implies worsening economic conditions without explicitly stating hardship. Similarly, *Galaziw'enzihi* '1981' conveys that success depends on an individual's effort, while *Biruga Omumpiita* '2019' links achievement with hard work. The findings further reveal that individual reflection is expected in *Wekebuke* '1974', *Wemoge* '1987', and *Webaze* '2003', all urging self-examination and questioning without direct instruction. The year named *Ijuka* '2015' prompts memory recall, subtly linking the past to personal awareness.

The findings also show that other names employ indirectness and metaphor, underpinning the shared understanding. The year named *Ija Balebe* '1976' expresses surprise, leaving its interpretation open-ended, while *Tikiliwa Igamba* '1979' suggests the lasting impact of an event (the Kagera war) without overtly detailing it. *Kakutantalikwa* '1988' discourages foolish behaviour through implication rather than direct scolding. *Shaya* '1972' and *Ige'nshamba* '2023' Ruhaya year names hint at the importance of effort and strategic thinking without clearly imposing action. Lastly, the off-record strategy is demonstrated in *Nyin'eriwo* '1992', where it conveys a need without openly asking for help. From the findings in Table 4 above, it is evident that 13 year names in Ruhaya epitomise off-record politeness strategies by putting an emphasis on indirectness and inference, allowing for interpretation while retaining social harmony.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to conclude that the year naming practice within the Ruhaya speech community incorporates politeness strategies to facilitate effective communication. The year-naming practice not only serves the purpose of marking time, preserving collective experiences, and reinforcing social values but also embodies the four politeness strategies outlined in Brown and Levinson's theory. The results of this investigation reveal a substantial use of positive politeness strategies, with 26 out of the 68 examined Ruhaya year names reflecting a strong sense of solidarity, positive social interaction, and social cohesion within the Bahaya community. On the other hand, other politeness strategies like negative, bald on record and off-record were employed to varying levels, showing the sociolinguistic grounds in which Ruhaya is used in a particular society. Additionally, the Ruhaya year names reflect what is transpired, been believed, experienced, heard, and witnessed in the Ruhaya speech community focusing on the sociolinguistic circumstances of the society.

5.2 Recommendation

Since the paper was limited to Ruhaya year names, one can conduct a similar study in other Bantu languages to see what is transpiring in relation to the tradition of year naming. Similarly, a comparative study could be made to analyse politeness strategies in personal naming versus year naming in Bantu and non-Bantu languages.

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