



## East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

[ejass.eanso.org](http://ejass.eanso.org)

Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN  
NATURE &  
SCIENCE  
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

### The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice?

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Article DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.1.1245>

Date Published: **ABSTRACT**

09 June 2023

**Keywords:**

*Euphemism,  
Gender,  
Interaction,  
Swahili,  
Taboo.*

Swahili speakers confirm the presence of little interaction between males and females about taboo themes irrespective of the age of the interlocutors. The tendency is speculatively attributed to religion and patriarchy in society. However, a plausible cause, such as the difference in language use between males and females, had not been investigated before the current study. Consequently, the present study compared euphemism usage between Swahili male and female speakers on sex, sexual subjects, and other taboo subjects to correlate the communication tendencies and the amount of communication between the two genders. The tested null hypothesis was, "There is no significant difference in euphemism usage between male and female Swahili speakers." The t-test was based on data from 192 males and 192 females. The finding indicates that only three out of eleven taboo topics had gender-based discrepancies in the use of euphemisms among Swahili speakers. The result implies that the speech differences between males and females are not responsible for the shortfall of interaction about sensitive topics among Swahili speakers. In this regard, further correlational tests are suggested to establish the actual cause of this phenomenon which affects the welfare of society.

#### APA CITATION

Charles, L. & Ochieng, D. (2023). The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice? *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 331-347. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.1.1245>

#### CHICAGO CITATION

Charles, Lazaro and Dunlop Ochieng. 2023. "The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice?" *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 6 (1), 331-347. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.6.1.1245>.

#### HARVARD CITATION

Charles, L. & Ochieng, D. (2023) "The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice?"; *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(1), pp. 331-347. doi: 10.37284/eajass.6.1.1245.

#### IEEE CITATION

L., Charles & D., Ochieng, "The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice?"; *EAJASS*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 331-347, Jun. 2023.

#### MLA CITATION

Charles, Lazaro & Dunlop Ochieng. "The Dearth of Interaction about Taboo Themes between Swahili Males and Females: Is it Emanating from the Differences in Euphemisms Choice?". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, no. 1, Jun. 2023, pp. 331-347, doi:10.37284/eajass.6.1.1245.

## INTRODUCTION

Interactions between females and males are very important as they facilitate good communication, better understanding, and collaboration between the two genders. Interaction by both genders is also vital in establishing healthy relationships and building trust and understanding, promoting positive communication. Furthermore, interaction can also help to abolish gender stereotypes and promote equality. By interacting well with individuals of different genders, people get an opportunity to gain new perspectives, learn from each other, and broaden their ways of thinking. Research has shown that gender has a great impact on group interaction. Studies demonstrate that females generally show a greater amount of agreement and other positive social behaviours, such as showing group solidarity and relieving group tension, while men engross in a huge amount of disagreement (Mabry, 1985; Piliavin & Martin, 1978; Stake, 1981) and task behaviours, like giving suggestions, directions, and opinions (Aries, 1982; Carli, 1989; Heiss, 1962; Piliavin & Martin, 1978; Strodtbeck & Mann, 1956; Zelditch, 1955).

Men and women have to discuss all issues in their life, including those considered taboo in many societies, such as sex, death, and defecation, in order to ensure healthy interaction. A little discussion on these phenomena greatly affecting the welfare of society is likely to lead to social problems and conflicts between the genders (Allan & Burrige, 2006; Keturi & Lehmonen, 2012). Our informal research in the Swahili-speaking community established that women rarely interacted with men on topics such as sex, defecation, and death. Instead, it was learnt that men tended to discuss such issues with fellow men and women with fellow women.

This tendency was attributed to the religious upbringing of speakers and the deep-rooted patriarchy in society. However, the concern of the present study was the neglect of the key hypotheses on the cause of this problem, such as the differences in the speech habit between men and women. Against this backdrop, Swahili speakers' usage of euphemisms by males and females was deemed unique and thus deserved a comprehensive study like this one. The study focused on the use of euphemisms as a strategy to avoid the offence inherent in taboo expressions. The significant discrepancy in euphemisms between male and female Swahili speakers could mean little interaction between the two genders about taboo topics. Therefore, females and males could avoid topics attracting vulgar expressions, such as sex and sexual activities, to save face and avoid embarrassment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The surveyed literature indicates that several studies have been done to establish how males and females interact in various aspects. One such study was done by Namisi et al. (2009) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Mankweng in Cape Town, South Africa. The findings of the study established that adolescent males favoured receiving sexual information from their fathers, while among females, there was a higher preference for their mothers. The finding of this study is not surprising as research indicates that fathers communicate more with their sons and mothers with their daughters (Dilorio et al., 1999; Jaccard et al., 2000; Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998; Amoran et al., 2005; Clifford et al., 2002).

Studies have confirmed that males' and females' different life experiences and perceptions lead to differences in the use of various aspects of language

(Lakoff, 1986). For instance, the usage of taboo language has been closely associated with gender. Gao (2008) researched the use of taboo language in men's and women's conversations in a mixed gender talk in some episodes of the American TV series *Sex and the City*. The researcher examined the similarities and differences in using taboo words by both. The study's findings indicated that both gender characters in the TV series employed taboo-related language, including verbal taboo. In 2012, Talley examined the influence of gender differences in the use of taboo language in Taiwan. The study involved 100 male and 100 female university students filling out a questionnaire to check their taboo language usage. The results indicated a significant difference in frequency between males and females in using taboo language.

A similar study by Hadian (2015) sought to establish whether men and women used taboos differently in their day-to-day conversation in Persian. The questionnaire was administered to 50 male and 50 female EFL students taking B.A. at Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch in Isfahan, Iran. The results indicated that male students used taboo words with a difference of 1.73% more frequently than female students. However, the study revealed that both males and females had the same attitude to the use of taboos in their conversations. Hasanah (2021) studied the use of taboos between male and female Aceh speakers and found that male students tended to use taboo words more than female students in certain circumstances and emotions, such as anger, shock, joy, and sorrow. On the other hand, women are exposed to more pressure when it comes to following the rules and living up to society's expectations (Cameron, 1997; Chambers & Trudgill, 1998; Crawford, 1995). A woman who uses bad language will likely usher in negative social ascriptions regarding her moral standing and character (Stapleton, 2003).

The current study correlated the use of euphemism and gender to inform a strategy to enhance the

mutual interaction between the two genders. The study was guided by the null hypothesis stating, "There is no significant difference in euphemism usage between male and female Swahili speakers." The alternative hypothesis states, "There is a significant difference in euphemism usage between male and female Swahili speakers." The current study's findings will give the Swahili-speaking community a better understanding of how these two groups use this language phenomenon and the existing association between the use of taboo language and euphemisms. This, in turn, helps to eliminate the possible misunderstanding caused by miscommunication resulting from using inappropriate expressions in addressing a specific gender.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study was conducted in Zanzibar (specifically in Unguja Urban District). This area was selected for its merit of being the epicentre of the Swahili language, giving the advantage of coming up with the data that truly portray the forms of euphemisms that speakers of this language favour. The population for the present study consisted of all males and females aged 18 years and above who live in the specified study area. The population of this age category was thought to understand the correct use of language, especially the use of euphemisms in different contexts. However, the population size involved in the present study was unknown. The study used Almeda, Capistrano, and Sarte's (2010) formula that enables the calculation of sample size of unknown population size, and it is used when the margin of error is 5%. This formula is given here under:

$$n = \frac{\left(\frac{Z_{\alpha}}{2}\right)^2}{4e^2}$$

Where,

n= sample size, e= margin of error (0.05), and  $Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}} = \pm 1.96$

Thus, the sample size of the respondents was;

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2}{4 \times (0.05)^2} = \frac{3.8416}{0.01} = 384.16 \approx 384$$

Thus, the overall sample size involved in the present study was 384 individuals.

Of all 384 respondents, 192 were male and 192 were female. The data for the present study were collected using a questionnaire. A questionnaire was constructed with columns A and B. Column A consisted of a list of taboo topics. Column B consisted of a list of euphemisms used for a particular taboo topic. Some of the euphemisms used to make this questionnaire were derived from the researchers themselves since the researchers have adequate knowledge of this language. Other euphemisms the researchers found in various publications where euphemisms were used to talk about different taboo themes.

The respondents were asked to tick from the list the euphemisms they use for the specific topic. The responses were written down for analysis. The frequencies of the euphemisms were used in testing the stated null hypothesis using the t-test function found in Excel software. We used the means of the two variables and other statistical data produced during the test to interpret the findings. When the difference in the means of the compared groups is not equal to zero, we establish a difference between the two groups. However, to determine the significance level of the difference, other statistical values like the p-value, a t-statistic, a t-critical, and the alpha value obtained after conducting the t-test were used to determine the strength of the difference. These values helped in rejecting or accepting the stated null hypothesis. Two rules were used in concluding. One, the null hypothesis prevails if the p-value is higher than the alpha value, which is 0.05. Secondly, the null hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic value is smaller than the t-critical value and vice versa. Based on the

association we want to establish on the use of taboo language and euphemisms, when we accept the null hypothesis, we establish that speech differences between males and females are not responsible for the paucity of interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers. When we reject the hypothesis, we establish that the speech differences between males and females are responsible for the scarcity of interaction on taboo topics among Swahili speakers.

## RESULTS

The findings were presented based on various thematic categories of taboo themes and their corresponding euphemisms. The topics whose euphemisms were investigated include sex, bodily emissions, diseases (AIDS), death, and corruption.

### **Sexual Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers**

Sexual euphemisms are sweet-sounding expressions used to evade talking directly about sexual activity, the state of the body during the sexual act and clothes in direct contact with the sexual body parts (Kusumah, 2019). Sexual-related topics are among the most euphemised topics in every era and culture. This has made these topics attract various euphemisms. The following subsections present and compare euphemism usage between male and female Swahili speakers when talking about various topics related to sex.

### ***Sexual Intercourse Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers***

Sexual intercourse is perceived as socially and morally insensible (Ihtiyorjon & Sangcheol, 2021), making it the source of various euphemisms. This part aimed to unveil and compare the euphemisms preferred by male and female Swahili speakers when discussing this subject and consider whether the two groups use these expressions similarly or dissimilarly.

**Table 1: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Sexual Intercourse**

| Euphemism                    | Gloss                      | M<br>(f) | FM<br>(f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |          |         |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|
|                              |                            |          |           |                                      | M        | FM      |
| <i>Kujamiiana</i>            | to socialise               | 184      | 167       | Mean                                 | 144.8    | 139.45  |
| <i>Kutafunana</i>            | to eat one another         | 129      | 144       | Variance                             | 1685.747 | 1905.42 |
| <i>Kulalana</i>              | to sleep over one another  | 73       | 96        | Observations                         | 20       | 20      |
| <i>Kufanyana</i>             | to do one another          | 75       | 72        | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.941    |         |
| <i>Kufanya tendo la ndoa</i> | to do marital act          | 187      | 189       | Hypothesized Mean Difference         | 0        |         |
| <i>Kupata haki ya ndoa</i>   | to get marital right       | 183      | 185       | df                                   | 19       |         |
| <i>Kula mzigo</i>            | to eat luggage             | 115      | 76        | t Stat                               | 1.623    |         |
| <i>Kupata unyumba</i>        | to get marital right       | 170      | 181       | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.061    |         |
| <i>Kulala</i>                | to sleep                   | 187      | 180       | t Critical one-tail                  | 1.729    |         |
| <i>Kukunana</i>              | to scratch one another     | 124      | 111       | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.121    |         |
| <i>Kula tunda</i>            | to eat fruit               | 154      | 151       | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.093    |         |
| <i>Kula uroda</i>            | to eat something delicious | 168      | 147       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kukutana kimwili</i>      | to meet bodily             | 186      | 181       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kufanya mapenzi</i>       | to make love               | 190      | 188       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kukamuana</i>             | to squeeze one another     | 73       | 69        |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kutifuana</i>             | to wrestle one another     | 125      | 109       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kutafuta watoto</i>       | searching for children     | 153      | 161       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kupaswana</i>             | to pierce each other       | 106      | 95        |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kudonoana</i>             | pecking each other         | 130      | 101       |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Kuingiliana</i>           | to enter one another       | 184      | 186       |                                      |          |         |

KEY: f = frequency; FM = Female speakers; M = Male speakers; P = P-value

The means of the two variables presented in *Table 1* reveal a difference in the use of euphemisms related to sexual intercourse between the two groups, with the males' mean exceeding the females' mean. However, to determine whether this difference is significant enough, we used other values obtained in the hypothesis test presented in the same table. *Table 1* indicates a p-value of 0.121, which is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. *Table 1* further shows a t-statistic value of 1.623, which is higher than the t-critical (which is 2.093) at the alpha level of 0.05. We accept the null hypothesis since the p-value is higher than the alpha value and the t-statistic is smaller than the t-critical. This implies that speech differences between males and females are not responsible for the dearth of

interaction about taboo topics among Swahili speakers.

#### ***Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Male Sexual Organ***

Sexual euphemisms also involve sexual body parts (genitalia). These parts are highly associated with taboo connotations and have given rise to various euphemisms. The Swahili speech community is restricted to talking straightforwardly about the male sexual organ in public, especially in formal settings. Thus, speakers of this language have created various euphemisms to talk about this topic politely. Consider the expressions presented in *Table 2*.

**Table 2: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Male Sexual Organ**

| Euphemism        | Gloss             | M<br>(f) | FM<br>(f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |          |         |
|------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|
|                  |                   |          |           |                                      | M        | FM      |
| <i>Dudu</i>      | worm-like thing   | 68       | 52        | Mean                                 | 148.5    | 137.2   |
| <i>Jogoo</i>     | cork              | 182      | 173       | Variance                             | 1427.167 | 2012.18 |
| <i>Mhogo</i>     | <i>wa</i> cassava | 143      | 87        | Observations                         | 10       | 10      |
| <i>jang'ombe</i> |                   |          |           |                                      |          |         |
| <i>Muwa</i>      | sugarcane         | 139      | 160       | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.856    |         |
| <i>Uume</i>      | manhood           | 192      | 192       | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0        |         |
| <i>Kiboko</i>    | whip              | 154      | 165       | df                                   | 9        |         |
| <i>Ukuni</i>     | firewood          | 121      | 123       | t Stat                               | 1.540    |         |
| <i>Mtaimbo</i>   | rod bar           | 188      | 180       | P(T<=t) one-tail                     | 0.079    |         |
| <i>Mpini</i>     | hoe/axe handle    | 128      | 112       | t Critical one-tail                  | 1.833    |         |
| <i>Mkongojo</i>  | walking staff     | 170      | 128       | P(T<=t) two-tail                     | 0.158    |         |
|                  |                   |          |           | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.262    |         |

The means of the two variables shown in *Table 2* indicate the presence of a difference in the use of euphemisms for male sexual organs between the two genders. As the table indicates, males used these expressions more than female speakers. Nevertheless, we needed to consider the other t-test values in the table to establish whether this difference is significant. *Table 2* shows a p-value of 0.158, which is higher than the alpha value of 0.05. *Table 2* also indicates a t-statistic value of 1.54 and a t-critical of 2.262. The t-statistic shown here is smaller than the t-critical. Therefore, the values indicated by the p-value against the alpha value and the t-statistic against the t-critical indicate the absence of a significant difference in using euphemisms for this taboo aspect between the two groups. This being the case, we accept the stated

null hypothesis. We, therefore, affirm that the speech differences between males and females do not cause minimal interaction on taboo topics among Swahili speakers.

#### ***Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females for Female Sexual Organ***

As with the male sexual organ, the female sexual organ is not entertained to be spoken explicitly among Swahili speakers. Consequently, it has resulted in the formation of several euphemisms to avoid mentioning it (this organ) directly in public. In this part, we present and compare euphemism usage by male and female speakers of Swahili to determine whether gender differences significantly influence the use of these expressions.

**Table 3: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Female Sexual Organ**

| Euphemism    | Gloss                              | M<br>(f) | FM<br>(f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |       |        |
|--------------|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------|--------|
|              |                                    |          |           |                                      | M     | FM     |
| <i>Uke</i>   | womanhood                          | 191      | 192       | Mean                                 | 109   | 75.5   |
| <i>Utamu</i> | sweetness                          | 143      | 14        | Variance                             | 3634  | 4545.1 |
| <i>Tunda</i> | fruit                              | 138      | 84        | Observations                         | 6     | 6      |
| <i>Mzigo</i> | luggage                            | 67       | 81        | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.672 |        |
| 'K'          | short form for female sexual organ | 23       | 3         | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0     |        |
| <i>Chini</i> | down                               | 92       | 79        | df                                   | 5     |        |
|              |                                    |          |           | t Stat                               | 1.574 |        |
|              |                                    |          |           | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.088 |        |
|              |                                    |          |           | t Critical one-tail                  | 2.015 |        |
|              |                                    |          |           | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.176 |        |
|              |                                    |          |           | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.571 |        |

As shown in *Table 3*, there is a difference in the use of euphemisms related to female sexual organs between male and female Swahili speakers. This difference is depicted in the means of the two groups. Nonetheless, it is not yet clear if this difference is significant. We, therefore, use other data found in the table to test if they show the difference is significant enough to nullify the stated hypothesis. In *Table 3*, the p-value of 0.176 is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. Furthermore, the table reveals the t-statistic of 1.574, which is smaller than the t-critical, which is 2.571. These values indicate no statistically significant evidence to reject the first null hypothesis. This leads us to conclude that the speech differences between the two genders are not responsible for the paucity of

interaction on disturbing topics among Swahili speakers.

#### ***Euphemisms Preferred by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Semen***

Human semen is a protein-rich body fluid produced by the male reproductive organs (Gupta & Kumar, 2017). This fluid is forced out of this organ through the urinary tract. Since the production of semen is associated with sexual activities, it is considered taboo among the Swahili speech community. This has triggered the creation of several euphemisms to avoid talking about this fluid in straight language. This section presents and compares euphemisms used by male and female Swahili speakers when talking about semen.

**Table 4: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers to Refer to Semen**

| Euphemism                 | Gloss             | M<br>(f) | FM<br>(f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |         |         |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                           |                   |          |           |                                      | M       | FM      |
| <i>Mbegu (za kiume)</i>   | (male) seeds      | 192      | 189       | Mean                                 | 123     | 83.125  |
| <i>Watoto</i>             | children          | 133      | 109       | Variance                             | 922.286 | 2821.27 |
| <i>Mkojo mweupe</i>       | white urine       | 102      | 37        | Observations                         | 8       | 8       |
| <i>Mkojo mzito</i>        | heavy urine       | 105      | 19        | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.936   |         |
| <i>Mkojo wa mtu mzima</i> | adult's urine     | 117      | 69        | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0       |         |
| <i>Wazungu</i>            | white men         | 96       | 50        | df                                   | 7       |         |
| <i>Maji ya uzima</i>      | water of life     | 124      | 95        | t Stat                               | 4.190   |         |
| <i>Maji ya baraka</i>     | water of blessing | 115      | 97        | P(T<=t) one-tail                     | 0.002   |         |
|                           |                   |          |           | t Critical one-tail                  | 1.895   |         |
|                           |                   |          |           | P(T<=t) two-tail                     | 0.004   |         |

Looking at *Table 4*, we find unequal means of the two compared variables in their use of euphemisms related to semen. However, we are not yet aware of the extent to which these two groups differ in their use of these expressions. We thus use other data available in the table to determine the significance of the difference indicated in the means of these variables. As shown in *Table 4*, the p-value is reading 0.004, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. *Table 4* also shows a t-statistic of 4.19, which is higher than a t-critical value of 2.365. Since the p-value is smaller than the alpha value of 0.05 and the t-statistic is greater than the t-critical, we reject our null hypothesis. This leads us to conclude that the speech differences between males and females

are responsible for the dearth of interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

***Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females for Orgasm***

Orgasm is another sexual aspect considered sensitive, making people refrain from talking about it directly. This has made people create various euphemisms to talk about it more comfortably. In this section, the euphemisms used by male and female Swahili speakers when discussing orgasm are presented and compared to see if there is a significant difference in their use of these expressions.

**Table 5: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Orgasm**

| Euphemism              | Gloss              | M<br>(f) | FM<br>(f) | t-Test: Paired two sample for means |          |         |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------|---------|
|                        |                    |          |           | M                                   | FM       |         |
| <i>Kufika kileleni</i> | to get to the peak | 183      | 191       | Mean                                | 134.7143 | 100.714 |
| <i>Kukojoa</i>         | to urinate         | 142      | 101       | Variance                            | 1499.905 | 4097.57 |
| <i>Kurusha maji</i>    | to pour water      | 102      | 74        | Observations                        | 7        | 7       |
| <i>Kumaliza safari</i> | to finish journey  | 189      | 185       | Pearson Correlation                 | 0.948    |         |
| <i>Kuridhika</i>       | to get satisfied   | 126      | 51        | Hypothesised Mean Difference        | 0        |         |
| <i>Kutoa</i>           | to produce         | 110      | 77        | df                                  | 6        |         |
| <i>wazungu</i>         | white men          |          |           | t Stat                              | 3.001    |         |
| <i>Kutoa oili</i>      | to pour out oil    | 91       | 26        | P (T<=t) one-tail                   | 0.012    |         |
|                        |                    |          |           | t Critical one-tail                 | 1.943    |         |
|                        |                    |          |           | P (T<=t) two-tail                   | 0.024    |         |
|                        |                    |          |           | t Critical two-tail                 | 2.447    |         |

The data in *Table 5* indicate that the two groups use euphemisms referring to orgasm differently. *Table 5* reveals a p-value of 0.024, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Additionally, *Table 5* shows the t-statistic of 3.001, which is greater than the t-critical, which is 2.447. These values lead us to the rejection of our null hypothesis. The data indicate that the two groups differ significantly in using euphemisms referring to orgasm. Males seem to use these expressions more than females, with the

former showing a mean of 134.7143 while the latter showing a mean of 100.714. We, therefore, conclude that the speech differences between the two genders are responsible for the dearth of interaction on unpleasant topics among Swahili speakers.

***Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Bodily Emissions***



This section presents and compares the alternative linguistic expressions used by male and female Swahili speakers to refer to various bodily emissions with taboo connotations. These emissions and their corresponding euphemisms are presented in the following subsections as male and female Swahili speakers use them.

***Euphemisms Favoured by Swahili Males and Females for Menstruation***

The monthly shading of blood by a mature female human being through her sexual organ is considered

taboo by various speech communities. This has triggered the formation of various euphemistic expressions to talk about this situation in polite language. This section presents euphemisms favoured by male and female Swahili speakers to refer to this aspect. In addition, the frequencies of using these expressions by both groups are compared to determine if the null hypothesis can be accepted or rejected.

**Table 6: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers to Refer to Menstruation**

| Euphemism               | Gloss                      | M (f) | FM (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |        |         |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|
|                         |                            |       |        |                                      | M      | FM      |
| <i>Kuwa katika siku</i> | to be on days              | 191   | 192    | Mean                                 | 182.83 | 177.333 |
| <i>Kunyeshwa mvua</i>   | shower rain                | 174   | 168    | Variance                             | 48.167 | 303.867 |
| <i>Kuwa mchafu</i>      | to be dirty                | 179   | 175    | Observations                         | 6      | 6       |
| <i>Kupata wageni</i>    | to be visited by strangers | 183   | 189    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.736  |         |
| <i>Kuwa mwezini</i>     | to be on the moon          | 191   | 192    | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0      |         |
| <i>Kuvuja</i>           | to leak                    | 179   | 148    | df                                   | 5      |         |
|                         |                            |       |        | t Stat                               | 1.022  |         |
|                         |                            |       |        | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.177  |         |
|                         |                            |       |        | t Critical one-tail                  | 2.015  |         |
|                         |                            |       |        | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.354  |         |
|                         |                            |       |        | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.571  |         |

In *Table 6*, we find the mean difference in using euphemisms for menstruation between the two groups. This shows that the two groups vary in their use of euphemisms related to the topic. However, we are not yet informed of the significance level of this discrepancy. We thus use other statistical data generated in the table after carrying out a t-test to determine the strength of the shown difference. As shown in *Table 6*, the p-value is 0.354, which is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. The table also shows a t-statistic value of 1.022, which is smaller than the t-critical value of 2.571. The fact that the p-value is greater than the alpha value and the t-statistic is less than the t-critical indicates no satisfactory evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

This makes us accept the null hypothesis. This entails that the speech differences between the two genders do not influence the dearth of interaction on taboo topics among Swahili speakers.

***Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females for Defecation***

Removing by-products from the stomach through the back opening is a normal biological process. However, surprisingly, many people avoid talking about this process directly in public as it is attached to some taboo connotations. This has motivated people to form various euphemisms to talk about it politely and pleasantly. This section compares the euphemisms favoured by male and female Swahili

speakers when discussing defecation and determines whether there is a significant difference or similarity in using these expressions between the two groups.

**Table 7: Euphemisms Preferred by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Defecation**

| Euphemism                   | Gloss                    | M (f) | M (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |         |         |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                             |                          |       |       | M                                    | FM      |         |
| <i>Kujisaidia</i>           | to help oneself          | 192   | 192   | Mean                                 | 176.272 | 160.182 |
| <i>Kusafisha tumbo</i>      | to clean the stomach     | 191   | 188   | Variance                             | 633.218 | 2992.16 |
| <i>Kunyoosha utumbo</i>     | to stretch the intestine | 176   | 187   | Observations                         | 11      | 11      |
| <i>Kutoa vyakula</i>        | to eject food            | 120   | 77    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.913   |         |
| <i>Kukata gogo</i>          | to cut log               | 137   | 31    | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0       |         |
| <i>Kupunguza uzito</i>      | to reduce weight         | 189   | 163   | df                                   | 10      |         |
| <i>Kwenda kuchimba dawa</i> | to dig up herbs          | 191   | 190   | t Stat                               | 1.601   |         |
| <i>Kwenda msalani</i>       | to go to toilet          | 192   | 192   | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.070   |         |
| <i>Kwenda chooni</i>        | to go to the toilet      | 192   | 191   | t Critical one-tail                  | 1.812   |         |
| <i>Kukamua utumbo</i>       | to squeeze intestine     | 168   | 160   | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.140   |         |
| <i>Kwenda haja kubwa</i>    | to go for a long call    | 191   | 191   | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.228   |         |

Table 7 shows the p-value of 0.070, which is higher than the alpha value of 0.05. The table also indicates a t-statistic value of 1.601, which is below the t-critical value which is 1.812. These values indicate no significant difference in using euphemisms referring to defecation between the two groups. This makes us accept the stated null hypothesis. The means of the two variables also prove this, as the difference between them is very narrow (with male speakers having a mean of 176.272 and female speakers having a mean of 160.182). Given the number of euphemisms presented for this topic, this difference between the two means is insignificant. This implies that the speech differences between males and females are not responsible for the

shortfall of interaction on taboo topics among Swahili speakers.

#### **Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females for AIDS**

AIDS was like no other disease at its inception – it was a real threat to humankind. For this reason, people feared talking about it directly. This necessitated the creation of various euphemisms to talk about this awful disease more comfortably. In this part, euphemisms that males and females favour among Swahili speakers to talk about AIDS are presented and compared to establish whether the two groups employ these expressions similarly or differently.

**Table 8: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for AIDS**

| Euphemism                | Gloss          | M (f) | FM (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |             |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|-------------|
|                          |                |       |        | M                                    | FM          |
| <i>Miwaya</i>            | wires          | 191   | 184    | Mean                                 | 181.6 169.4 |
| <i>Umeme</i>             | electricity    | 174   | 163    | Variance                             | 74.8 204.3  |
| <i>Malaria ya kisasa</i> | modern malaria | 185   | 179    | Observations                         | 5 5         |
| <i>Ngoma</i>             | drum           | 187   | 173    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.940       |
| <i>Moto</i>              | fire           | 171   | 148    | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0           |
|                          |                |       |        | df                                   | 4           |
|                          |                |       |        | t Stat                               | 3.992       |
|                          |                |       |        | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.008       |
|                          |                |       |        | t Critical one-tail                  | 2.132       |
|                          |                |       |        | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.016       |
|                          |                |       |        | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.776       |

*Table 8* shows the difference in means between the two compared groups. This enlightens that the two groups diverge in using euphemisms for AIDS. Despite this revelation, the strength of this difference is not yet known. We thus use other statistical data presented here to determine the strength of the spotted difference. As *Table 8* indicates, the p-value is 0.01, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. The table further shows a t-statistic of 3.992, a figure greater than the t-critical of 2.776. Since the p-value is smaller than the alpha value and the t-statistic is greater than the t-critical, it indicates that there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The rejection of the null hypothesis paves the way for accepting the alternative hypothesis. This means that the speech differences between males and females determine interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

### **Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Topics Related to Death**

This part is aimed at unveiling and comparing the euphemisms favoured by male and female Swahili speakers when talking about various aspects related to death and establishing whether there are any similarities or differences in the use of these expressions by both groups. Several topics related to death are presented in the following subsections.

#### ***Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females to Talk about Death***

Death is one of the themes which are highly euphemised due to the fear associated with it. *Table 9* compares euphemisms preferred by male and female Swahili speakers to determine if the two groups use these expressions similarly or differently. As in the preceding sections, we use the t-test function to test the null hypothesis.

**Table 9: Euphemisms Preferred by Male and Female Swahili Speakers for Death**

| Euphemism                                 | Gloss                           | M (f) | FM (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |         |         |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|   |                                 |       |        |                                      | M       | FM      |
| <i>Kuaga dunia</i>                        | leaving the earth               | 192   | 192    | Mean                                 | 180.875 | 173.813 |
| <i>Kuhitimisha safari ya hapa duniani</i> | to end the journey on the earth | 192   | 192    | Variance                             | 773.983 | 2160.16 |
| <i>Kuitwa na Mungu</i>                    | to be called by God             | 190   | 192    | Observations                         | 16      | 16      |
| <i>Kulala usingizi wa mauti</i>           | falling asleep to death         | 192   | 192    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.993   |         |
| <i>Kuwatoka watu</i>                      | to leave people                 | 192   | 192    | Hypothesized Difference              | Mean    | 0       |
| <i>Kuzima</i>                             | to halt                         | 104   | 58     | df                                   |         | 15      |
| <i>Kufumba macho</i>                      | to close eyes                   | 192   | 192    | t Stat                               |         | 1.478   |
| <i>Kunyamaza</i>                          | to stop talking                 | 191   | 192    | P (T<=t) one-tail                    |         | 0.080   |
| <i>Kulala</i>                             | to sleep                        | 188   | 181    | t Critical one-tail                  |         | 1.753   |
| <i>Kutangulia mbele za haki</i>           | to go forth for justification   | 192   | 192    | P (T<=t) two-tail                    |         | 0.160   |
| <i>Kupata msiba</i>                       | to be bereaved                  | 192   | 192    | t Critical two-tail                  |         | 2.131   |
| <i>Mgonjwa amemaliza</i>                  | to complete (the journey)       | 185   | 188    |                                      |         |         |
| <i>Kuhitajika</i>                         | to be needed                    | 116   | 52     |                                      |         |         |
| <i>Kufika hatma</i>                       | to get to the end               | 192   | 191    |                                      |         |         |
| <i>Kupumzika</i>                          | to rest                         | 192   | 191    |                                      |         |         |
| <i>Kufariki dunia</i>                     | to get separated from the world | 192   | 192    |                                      |         |         |

In *Table 9*, we notice the difference in employing euphemisms related to death. This entails that both groups somehow diverge in using euphemisms related to this topic. Nevertheless, we are not yet aware of how big this difference is. We can only know this by using other statistical data in *Table 9*. Currently, our table depicts a p-value of 0.160 which is above the alpha value of 0.05. Furthermore, the table shows a t-statistic figure of 1.478, which is less than the t-critical, which is 2.131. These values publicise that there is no statistically significant difference in using euphemisms referring to death by the two groups. This being the case, we accept the null hypothesis

and conclude that the speech differences between the two genders are not responsible for the dearth of interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

#### ***Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females to Talk about Grave***

Where people are laid after dying is another aspect related to death that has attracted some euphemisms. This section presents and compares the euphemisms favoured by male and female speakers of Swahili when talking about the grave. Consider the euphemisms presented in *Table 10*.

**Table 10: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers to Refer to the Grave**

| Euphemism               | Gloss                 | M (f) | FM (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |         |        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|
|                         |                       |       |        |                                      | M       | FM     |
| <i>Malaloni</i>         | sleeping area         | 190   | 192    | Mean                                 | 182.75  | 177.75 |
| <i>Nyumba ya milele</i> | eternal home          | 159   | 137    | Variance                             | 251.583 | 738.25 |
| <i>Mavani</i>           | burial place          | 192   | 191    | Observations                         | 4       | 4      |
| <i>Mwanandani</i>       | an enclave in a grave | 190   | 191    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.998   |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0       |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | df                                   | 3       |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | t Stat                               | 0.877   |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | P(T<=t) one-tail                     | 0.223   |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | t Critical one-tail                  | 2.353   |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | P(T<=t) two-tail                     | 0.445   |        |
|                         |                       |       |        | t Critical two-tail                  | 3.182   |        |

*Table 10* indicates the presence of difference in mean in utilising euphemisms related to grave between the two compared groups. This reveals that the two groups differ in utilising euphemisms related to the specified topic. Nevertheless, to this point, we are not knowledgeable about the significance level of this difference. By using other statistical figures in the table, we can establish the strength of this difference. As shown in *Table 10*, the p-value of 0.445 is larger than the used alpha value. The table also shows the t-statistic of 0.877, which is less than the t-critical value of 3.182. Comparing the p-value against the alpha value and the t-statistic against the t-critical, it is safe to accept the stated null hypothesis. Therefore, the speech differences between males and females are not

responsible for the little communication on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

#### **Euphemisms Used by Swahili Males and Females for Corruption**

Corruption is the unlawful use of official power or influence by a government official either to enrich himself or further his course and/or any other person at the expense of the public, in contravention of one's oath of office and/or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in force (Ekiyor, 2009). Corruption is euphemised to make it more tolerable in society. *Table 11* compares euphemisms that male and female Swahili speakers resort to using when discussing corruption and corrupt acts done by public servants and other public figures.

**Table 11: Euphemisms Used by Male and Female Swahili Speakers to Refer to Corruption**

| Euphemism                | Gloss                          | M (f) | FM (f) | t-Test: Paired two samples for means |          |         |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|
|                          |                                |       |        |                                      | M        | FM      |
| <i>Mlungula</i>          | a bribe                        | 105   | 67     | Mean                                 | 175.167  | 166.333 |
| <i>Takrima</i>           | hospitality allowance          | 188   | 185    | Variance                             | 1184.567 | 2377.07 |
| <i>Ubadhirifu</i>        | embezzlement                   | 190   | 184    | Observations                         | 6        | 6       |
| <i>Matumizi ya ofisi</i> | <i>mabaya</i> misuse of office | 189   | 186    | Pearson Correlation                  | 0.999    |         |
| <i>Ufisadi</i>           | corruption                     | 192   | 192    | Hypothesised Mean Difference         | 0        |         |
| <i>Kitu kidogo</i>       | a small thing                  | 187   | 184    | df                                   | 5        |         |
|                          |                                |       |        | t Stat                               | 1.501    |         |
|                          |                                |       |        | P (T<=t) one-tail                    | 0.097    |         |
|                          |                                |       |        | t Critical one-tail                  | 2.015    |         |
|                          |                                |       |        | P (T<=t) two-tail                    | 0.194    |         |
|                          |                                |       |        | t Critical two-tail                  | 2.571    |         |

Table 11 demonstrates the presence of means difference in employing euphemisms associated with corruption between male and female Swahili speakers. This reveals that, to a certain extent, the two groups differ in their use of euphemisms related to corruption. However, the significance level of this difference is not yet precise. Using other statistical data found in the table, which were obtained after conducting a t-test, we can determine whether this difference is significant. The table indicates a p-value of 0.194, which is higher than the alpha value of 0.05. Furthermore, the table shows a t-statistic of 1.501, which is smaller than the t-critical value of 2.571. Given that the p-value is greater than the alpha value and that the t-statistic is smaller than the t-critical, we accept the stated null hypothesis. This signifies that the speech differences between the two genders are not responsible for the paucity of interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

## DISCUSSION

The current study focused on comparing the pattern of using euphemisms between male and female Swahili speakers and establishing whether this pattern influences the paucity of interaction on various taboo topics among Swahili speakers. After conducting quantitative analysis using the t-test, it

was found that, of all eleven taboo aspects investigated, only three aspects indicated the presence of a significant difference in the use of euphemisms between males and females among Swahili speakers. These topics are semen, orgasm, and AIDS. The first two of these aspects are related to sexuality, while the remaining one is related to diseases. Given that only three of these aspects led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, it is presumable that this discrepancy happened by chance and not because of gender differences. This being so, we establish that the speech differences between males and females are not responsible for the dearth of interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers.

The current study's finding is consistent with the other empirical studies that investigated the relationship between gender and euphemism usage. The studies by Al-Haq and Al-Smadi (2020), Al-Khasawneh (2018), Al-Khawaldeh (2014), Kapron-King and Xu (2021), Karimnia and Khodashenas (2016), McGlone and Batchelor (2003), Olimat (2020), and Rosadi et al., (2013) established that neither gender group significantly outperforms the other in using these expressions. However, the findings in other studies like the ones which were done by Hysi (2011), Mofarrej and Al-Haq (2015), Xia (2013), and Zaiets (2018) reported the presence

of significant differences in the use of euphemisms between men and women. The notable difference reported most often is that women use euphemisms more than men. Since euphemisms are part of day-to-day tools of polite communication, it is correct to establish that one's gender cannot influence their use. These expressions are open to being used by any member of society, provided that particular speakers know them (euphemisms). The current study supports the findings of studies that found the lack of significant difference in the use of these expressions by the two groups. The findings in some earlier studies that the two groups differ significantly in their use of euphemisms cannot also be ruled out due to cultural differences in speech communities.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of how males and females use language has been expansively researched and discussed, and one long-held supposition is that males use taboos more than females do. This would also mean that females use more euphemisms than males. If there is a discrepancy in the use of taboo words and euphemisms, avoiding taboo topics would be imminent to avoid embarrassment and save face. In this light, the current study investigated the correlation between the use of taboo language and the use of euphemisms to see if the use of euphemisms between the two genders might have caused the observed little interaction between females and males on taboo topics among Swahili speakers. Data analysis indicates that out of eleven taboo topics involved in the study, only three indicated the presence of a significant difference in euphemism usage between the two genders. This publicises that males and females use euphemisms in nearly the same way. This concludes that the speech differences between the two genders are not responsible for the minimal interaction on sensitive topics among Swahili speakers. The study suggests further correlational studies involving different independent variables to ascertain the real cause of little communication between men and women on

these impactful topics in society. Understanding the reason for this minimal interaction on the topic that matters will inform strategies to enhance interaction between gender, which implies more involvement of women in issues that affect their life directly and indirectly of this language phenomenon to build a more civilised society.

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