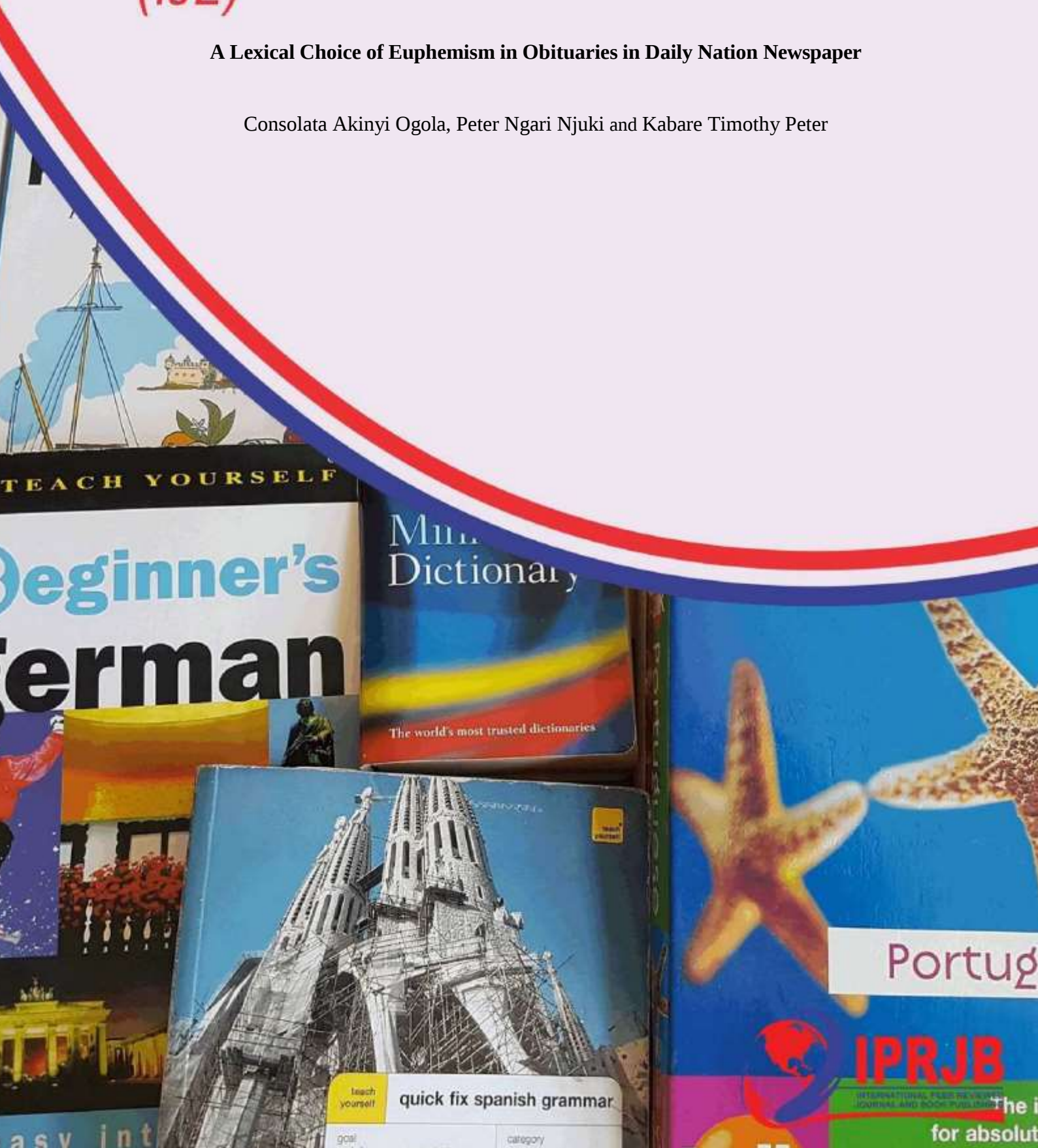


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A Lexical Choice of Euphemism in Obituaries in Daily Nation Newspaper

Consolata Akinyi Ogola, Peter Ngari Njuki and Kabare Timothy Peter



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^{1*}Consolata Akinyi Ogola
Tangaza University



²Peter Ngari Njuki
Tangaza University



³Kabare Timothy Peter
Tangaza University

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to explore how euphemistic language is used in obituary writing, focusing specifically on the predominant euphemistic expressions used to publish obituaries in Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper.

Methodology: The study employed the Mixed Method Research Design. The Quantitative Approach through Corpus Sampling enabled the researcher to collect numerical data from obituaries in the Daily Nation newspaper and established the common euphemisms in these obituaries that affect the reader. Likewise, a Quantitative Approach via Questionnaires aided the researcher in identifying the highly recommended euphemisms for use in obituaries so as to soften the impact of death on the reader. The also applied Qualitative Design through semi-structured interviews. The study drew on three sources: a content analysis of 144 obituaries randomly selected from Daily Nation newspaper publications from 2020 - 2022; 108 completed questionnaires collected from students and staff both teaching and subordinate of Tangaza University; and 10 in-depth interviews with individuals who had experienced the loss of a close family member.

Findings: The obituary analysis revealed a strong preference for euphemistic and respectful language in reporting death. Among the most frequently used verbs and phrasal verbs were —passed on| appearing 39 times out of 144 collected obituaries. This made (27.1%) of the total obituaries, —demisel 25 times (17.4%), —promotion to glory| 11 times (7.64), and —passed away| 5 times (3.47%). —Promotion to glory| appeared as a standalone phrase 21 times (14.6%), while —humble acceptance of God's will| 19 times (13.2%) and —celebration of a life well lived| 18 times (12.5%). Secondly, euphemisms provide emotional and psychological relief, acting as a linguistic cushion that allows people to cope with grief in a gentler way. Instead of confronting the harsh reality implied by direct terms like —died| or —was killed,| mourners are given softer language that eases the sense of loss and supports the healing process. Again, the use of euphemistic language in Kenyan obituaries revealed a profound cultural and religious awareness. The phrases commonly found in death announcements aligns with Christian and African worldviews that interpret death as a passage rather than a finality. Words such as —celebration of life| and —gone to be with the Lord| embody communal values and shared beliefs in the continuity of the human spirit. Additionally, these expressions carry spiritual significance, reaffirming collective faith in an afterlife and providing reassurance to the bereaved that their loved ones have journeyed on to another life. For many respondents, euphemisms are not simply linguistic softeners, they are affirmations of hope, belonging and Divine order. Similarly, the study found that euphemisms play a vital role in preserving social and linguistic sensitivity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study was anchored on Politeness Theory by Penelope Brown & Stephen Levinson (1987). In a setting where grief is both personal and shared, such language helps maintain respect, honor the memory of the departed and express compassion for the bereaved. The study suggests that media practitioners and newspaper editors promote the use of emotionally intelligence and culturally sensitive euphemistic language in crafting obituaries in the Daily Nation newspaper. It also recommends that the family writing obituaries to choose expressions that reflects the spirit, beliefs, values and personality of the deceased. Likewise, the study recommends the introduction of euphemisms analysis into language and literature curricular as a tool for teaching stylistics and disclose analysis

Keywords: Euphemism, Obituaries, Daily Nation Newspaper

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INTRODUCTION

Warren (1992) had an interest in euphemism. He conducted a study on what euphemisms tell us about the interpretation of the words and how the meaning of the words can be negotiated. The research presumed that the meaning of the content word has some aspects of meaning that joins reference as well as linking a form of word with referent. The study posits that Euphemisms are figurative words which are used to replace the words that seem offensive to the public or taboo words. In most cases, the interpretation of euphemism is dependent on the context in which the figurative language has been used and the audience or the reader. For example, in the King James Bible Mt 1:25, we read that; —*Joseph was raised from the sleep and he did as the angel had directed him. He took Mary his wife and knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son and she called him Jesus.* In the above example, the Bible reader or listener would interpret the word knew as sexual intercourse. The word knew has been used euphemistically. Conversely in the second example. —*I knew John would excel in business.* The word knew means to be aware hence, has not been used euphemistically. The context has aided the listener to arrive at the dictionary meaning of the word.

Similarly, Wira (2012) analyzed the pre-cognitive view on euphemism among the linguists in American and Polish mainly on lexical field and the formation of euphemisms. The research acknowledged that the use of euphemisms is widely accepted as a way for individuals to discuss sensitive topics, such as the loss of a loved one. However, some euphemisms are created solely for the purpose of manipulation and are used as slogans to conceal challenging circumstances. The research concluded that the use of euphemism is culture specific and differs according to situations. The context dictates whether or not a word can be termed as euphemistic expression.

Rawson (1981) as cited by Linfoot-Ham (2005) further ascertains that euphemisms are not only a social but also an emotional necessity since it gives people a room to talk about sensitive subjects such as but not limited to sex, death, personal appearance or religion without upsetting the hearer or the reader as well as maintaining civility.

While the scholars in the above studies were intrigued to study; What euphemisms tell us about the interpretation of words, pre-cognitive view on euphemism on lexical field, the formation of euphemisms and A Diachronic Study of Euphemism Formation, this study was also interested to research on euphemism.

As observed, substantial studies have been made in light of euphemizing the subject of death. However, this research digresses from the above studies because it specifically carried out a study on a lexical choice of euphemisms in obituaries in Daily Nation newspaper. It aimed to draw out the predominant euphemistic expressions used to publish obituaries in Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper, to find out how the choice of euphemism in obituaries published in Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper affects the reader and to suggest the highly recommended euphemisms that can be used in obituaries to soften the impact of death on the reader. Hence, adding new knowledge to the field of research.

The subject of death has always been problematic to talk about. Yet death is inevitable and we must talk about it. For this reason, people opt to use euphemisms and metaphors when speaking about the subject of death especially in writing obituaries. (Oyoko 2017) Over the years, people have understood euphemism differently.

Fromkin & Rodman (1983) stated that euphemisms are expressions used to swap a taboo word in the effort to evade unpleasant subjects for instance when referring to the body parts

especially the sexual organ. *Female private part* would be more appealing to the public ear than *vagina*, *copulation* would be more preferable to sexual intercourse. Similarly, going to *wash hands* would be opted rather than defecate.

Linfoot-Ham (2005) claims that euphemisms are figurative language for instance metaphor of poetry or prose for the purposes of entertaining, the language of political correctness which attempt to sidestep offenses and indirectness which are used to sustain respect and evade impudence.

Spears (2001) as cited by Wira (2012) Proposed a definition of euphemism as a relatively vague phrase which is used to replace a harsh word for example *demise* rather than *died*. Other areas where euphemism is used is with: physical stature, illness, death and dying. Example includes someone has *rested* instead of *died*, *vertically challenged* instead of *short* and *battling an illness* rather than *dying* (Smith 2022).

In Turnbull, J. et. l (2010) obituary has been described as a mini eulogy which makes public the demise of an individual mostly in the newspaper. It includes a short biography of the departed, close family members of the deceased, information about the funeral arrangement and the day for the interment.

Harper (2023) states that the word obituary was first used in English in 18th century. It can be traced back to Latin word *obīre*, where *ob* means (towards) and *īre* meaning *to go* when combined the word *obīre*, suggest —going towards one's death.

Fernandez (2009) argues that obituaries are such communicative state of affairs where the subject of death and dying is inevitable. Moses & Marelli (2003) argues that obituaries are special text with significant contents since they aim to present the dead person in the best way possible bringing out the best qualities of the person's life.

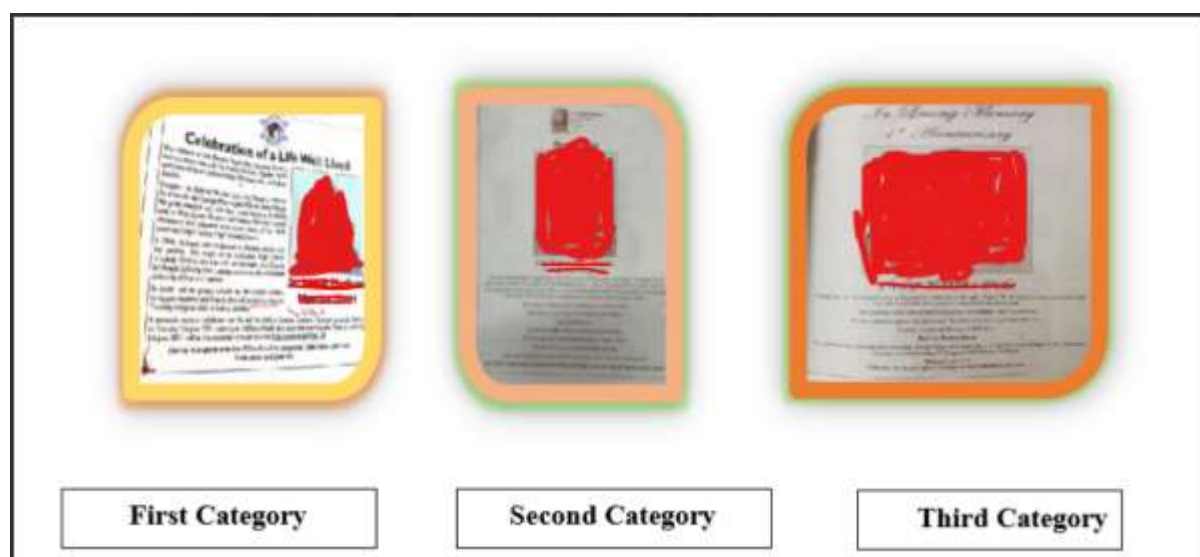
Oyoko (2017) observed that when discussing the emotive subject of death, there are other important aspect which revolve around this fearful instance. Some of them includes condolence messages which expresses empathy to the bereaved members, eulogy which explains the brief biography of the diseased, his or her relationship with the community and the society as well as the tribute offered to the departed by the close family members, friends and relatives and the significant others. An obituary is one among these elements which people use to illustrate the subject of death.

There are other means through which obituaries are disseminated apart from the newspaper. They include social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, twitter, Tiktok and online News Websites. Likewise, Audio for example through various Local Radio Stations, Public Community Bulletin Stations for example in the church or school notice boards, through email and newsletters are all different means of conveying death notice to the public. Various funeral homes have also websites where they often post the obituaries notices and other services they offer to the bereaved. In most cases, the obituaries are also announced verbally to the people in the work place, residence or in the community of the bereaved person.

The Daily Nation newspaper in Kenya publishes three categories of obituaries. The first category as illustrated in the first picture announces the death of an individual shortly after someone dies. It includes important details about the departed such as, the biodata of the deceased, the family members, the cause of death, the funeral arrangements and the day of interment. For example, the death notification of Sr. Lenah Muthoni Mambo, a Loreto sister who went to the Lord on 28th June, 2021 in Zambia.

The second type of obituaries as indicated on the second picture is written after the deceased has been buried. This is done to express gratitude to all those who were involved in one way or another in helping the family during the period of mourning and funeral of a loved one. In this example, the family of the late Jean Kagure Ngini Kamau communicate the message of appreciation to key persons, friends and all those who made the final sendoff of their loved one a success.

The third one is written during the anniversary of the departed in commemoration of the dead person. As an example, in the third picture, the family of the late Philip Malake Dido remember their loved one after one year of his demise. His family celebrates his life by holding a prayer service and unveiling the cross of his tomb in his memory.



Source: *Daily Nation Newspaper*

Statement of the Problem

Death is inevitable part of human life and we must talk about it. It is very essential to consider how best we can converse about death. Among the ways we can address the subject of death and dying is through euphemisms. Euphemism helps to address the notion of death without causing unnecessary pain to those who are left behind. For this reason, it is important to study the common euphemism which are used to craft obituaries more so in the Daily Nation newspaper and uncover how these euphemism affects the readers. It is also very important to recommend words that sounds more comforting when death occurs. In this way, it provides psychological support to the bereaved to come to terms with the reality of death.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This research has been anchored on Politeness Theory. Politeness theory was proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 1978 and revised in 1987. The theory is grounded in four key principles that people use to mitigate face threatening acts Namely, Bald On - Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness and Off - Record. It outlines how human beings can save their face during conversation, especially instances when the words used may cause harm to the listener. According to Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness is the—Action, linguistic or otherwise that redresses the speaker 's and hearer 's (face) in the situation whereby

face 'is threatened. Politeness theory is one of the sociolinguistics theories. The two scholars endeavored to codify how politeness is handled in the process of communication in their book "Politeness: Some Universal in Language Use" which was first published in 1978 and later reviewed and republished in 1987.

Brown & Penelope (1987) work was mostly influenced by Goffman (1967) work "Interaction Ritual: Essay on Face-to-Face Behavior." Goffman as cited by Smith (2023) was more interested on how people behave and the rituals they employ in their day-to-day encounter particularly in their social setting.

Application of Politeness Theory

Through applying Politeness Theory in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study, it helped the researcher to acquire an understanding of how the language is utilized to negotiate delicate and emotive subject of death at the same time upholding social cohesion and reverence. This was done in the following ways.

To begin with, the researcher collected 144 sample obituaries from the Daily Nation newspaper ranging from 2020-2022. Thereafter, different euphemisms which have been used in sampled obituaries was identified, extracted and listed for instance *finished the race* 'went to the Lord' and *rested*.

Secondly, the listed euphemism was studied via politeness theory framework as follows. The researcher employed Face Threatening Acts element to determine how specific euphemisms lessens the uncomfortable act of conversing about death. For instance, *laid to rest* rather than *buried* soften the harshness of interment. Similarly, face management as an element of politeness theory was used for data analysis. Positive face was used to examine how the lexical choices of euphemism in obituaries are employed to handle the legacy of the departed person while negative face was applied to examine how euphemisms used in obituaries reduce the potential of being offensive to the bereaved and readers of the obituaries in the process of announcing the demise of individuals.

With the aid of positive politeness strategy, the researcher investigated particular euphemism which are used to show a sense of admiration for the departed person due to his or her good qualities for instance *'a life well lived'*. Whereas the aspect of negative politeness was used to explore those euphemisms which are employed so as to minimize the possibility of the reader feeling uncomfortable while reading the obituary texts. As an example, *slept* in place of *died* is used to mitigate the emotional impact of the news to the reader.

Thirdly, the theory also helped to interpret the data by applying the above aspects of the theory (Face Threatening Act, the concept of Face, Politeness Strategies and Mitigation) to study the impact in which lexical choices of euphemism in obituaries has on reader's emotion - how the euphemisms are likely to give sense of comfort to the reader by minimizing emotional anguish which plain language may cause.

Politeness theory acknowledges the cultural diversity. Therefore, the strategies of politesse are deeply rooted in social cultural norms and practices. Guodong & Jing (2005) as cited by Sadeghoghli & Niroomand (2016) assert that even though politeness is a concept which is accepted worldwide, its meaning and expression may vary across culture, situation and personal factors. For this reason, the researcher applied the element of politeness strategies in considering the manner in which the choice of euphemisms in obituaries denotes cultural beliefs and values of the people while interpreting the data. Therefore, be culture sensitive as

different culture employ different mechanism in talking about the subject of grief and bereavement.

The researcher also used negative and positive politeness strategies to examine how euphemisms used in obituaries complies with social cultural beliefs on death and dying. The study employed negative and positive face to consider how the lexical choices of euphemism in obituaries helps to preserve the face of the deceased and the readers of obituaries.

Empirical Review

Fernández (2015) studied euphemism and conceptual metaphorisation in Victorian Obituaries. The objective of the study was to explore the euphemistic language used to craft obituary pages in Irish newspaper from the mid-nineteenth century. The study used Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to analyze the manner in which death is conceptualized in Victorian obituaries by use of metaphors and euphemisms. Ferdinand used qualitative research methods for the data collection. Corpus sampling was used to sample 228 obituaries from two Irish newspapers. The Connaught Journal (1840) and the Cork Examiner (1847) respectively. The findings of the study revealed that there was a prevalent use of euphemisms in Irish newspapers to mitigate the blunt reality of death. Indirect phrases such as ‘passed away’, ‘fell asleep’ or ‘departed’ were used to replace the word death. Also, several metaphors are used to depict death. For example, ‘crossing over’ ‘going home’ or ‘final journey’ which pictures death as a transition to another life. All this implies that the Irish people believe in life after death hence understanding the concept of death as a passage to an afterlife. Besides, death was also metaphorised as ‘sleep’ or ‘rest’ for instance ‘resting in peace’ or ‘eternal sleep’. The use of the metaphors was meant to portray death in a calmer and more peaceful light. The influence of culture and religion was evident from the study. Furthermore, the language employed was a reflection of Christian values which prevail in Irish culture. The believe of life after death informed how death was symbolically portrayed and perceived as the onset of life eternal rather than a conclusion.

Hänggi (2017) in Germany made a comparative investigation of the use of euphemisms for death and dying in obituaries in English and German. This study focused on examining and comparing euphemisms that are used in death and dying to reveal the cross-cultural differences inherent in the two languages. Hanggi's study used Communication Accommodations Theory as the primary theoretical framework which was developed by Giles (1971). This theory aided the researcher examine how language is adapted in order to conform with the social norms and sensitivity more so when it comes to delicate matters such as death. The study employed quantitative designs to analyze the euphemisms that are used to talk about death and dying. Eighty obituaries from each language were collected online from the website of the New York Times and in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung for data, then a comparative approach from a cross-cultural perspective was adopted. The research ascertained that the euphemism used in obituaries is culture-specific since it is influenced by the tribe and cultural norms of the people. It also discovered that the two languages used specific euphemisms to substitute death thus; affirming that the notion of death is culturally significant. This means that cultural factors play an important role as far as obituary is concerned. Culture determines what is considered acceptable. Since language can mirror the social norms of a given community, cultural differences can also manifest themselves in the use of euphemisms.

Rappleyea (2021) analyzed the language used in London Harrow obituaries from 1940 to 1950. The main objective of this research was to investigate the language in terms of

vocabulary and phrases that were used to write the obituaries in the Second World War and the subsequent five years after the war. He used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how language which relates to death mirrors societal values, the hierarchical structures of social status dynamism in attitude on grieving during and after the Second World War. In this research, quantitative research method was used to determine the frequent vocabularies and phrases which were used for both years. Word list format and n-gram were used for analysis. The results revealed noteworthy variance in the length and content of the obituaries owing to the difference in the subject and the manner of mortality after war. The subject and the content of the obituaries written after the war were longer and for the elderly people who had passed on as a result of natural causes. These obituaries emphasized more on the individual because of the changing nature of the life of the people. On the other hand, the obituaries that were written during the war were shorter because of the higher rate of people passing on. Unlike during the post-war obituaries, the latter were more memorial in nature.

Adepoju (2016) studied euphemistic metaphors in Nigerian's newspaper obituary announcements using data from five newspapers in Nigeria, namely; The Guardian, This Day, The Punch, Nigerian Tribune, and The Nation. The research focused on analyzing how euphemism has been used in obituary texts as a metaphor to discuss the mortality of human beings. He chose thirty-four texts from sixty-four obituaries to provide the metaphors that are associated with human mortality. It also aimed to understand how Nigerians view the concept of death. The research used the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as the theoretical framework for the studies. The study revealed that some obituaries use blunt words to convey death announcements regardless of their effects on the readers. However, most of them use euphemisms as metaphors to mitigate the sensitive subject of death when making it public. Such as *sleep in the Lord* and *a peaceful exit to eternal glory*. The study discovered seven euphemistic expressions used as metaphors to describe death; death as reward, end, loss, transition, journey, passage to joyful life, and death as eternal rest. Using a metaphor *Journey for Death* scored the highest. The researcher opined that this could be probably because the expression is psychologically simple and it perceives death as a mere process of undertaking from one state to another.

Yakub & Agyekum (2022) in Ghana studied the cognitive process of death euphemism in Nzema culture, one of the languages spoken in the southwest of Ghana. The main objective of the study was to understand the cognitive processes involved in Nzema death euphemistic expressions. The research focused mostly on how Nzema's social-cultural viewpoint is used to examine language use in context especially the socially acceptable words that relate to death. Conceptual Metaphor Theory was adopted for the background of the study with additional understanding derived from cultural conceptualization by Sharifian (2011) to explore the relationship between language, culture and conceptualizations. Content analysis approach was used for data analysis. Yakub & Agyekum (2022) study used a qualitative ethnographic research design. The data from July 2020 to August 2021 was collected from two communities. These were the metaphors which Nzema people used to relate death with such as death as *a journey* 'retirement', death as missing at the cross road, burial as *hiding or preserving*. Burying as *growing a seed* and coffin as *a house for a human being*. Participant and non-participant observation was used to gather data at different ethnographic scenarios related to death for example during the interment of the deceased since it is in such situations that conversation which pertains to death abounds. This study noted that the Nzema community discusses emotive subjects of death and related topics with caution to lessen the discomfort or

shock that may be evoked in such discussion. For this reason, metaphors as euphemisms are used to alleviate the emotional impact of discussing the subject of death and related topics. For instance, Nzema used metaphors of —death as *‘endless sleep’*, bereavement as *‘something falling into one’s eyes’*, burial as *‘sowing a seed’* and cemetery as a *‘place of rest.’* (Yakub & Agyekum, 2022)

Charles & Ochieng (2023) studied the distribution of euphemisms across taboo themes in Swahili in Tanzania. This work focused more on how euphemisms are used to replace words that are considered offensive when used in conversation. The study was based on Distributional Semantic Model by Harris (1954). This model enabled the researcher to determine the meaning of the words and phrases based on the context in which the word was used. It also aided the researcher to establish the hierarchy and sensitivity levels of Euphemisms by theme. For the data collection method, 192 female and 192 male Swahili speakers from 18 years and above were purposively selected to fill in the questionnaire to enable the researcher come up with data that portrays the various kind of Euphemisms used for different themes by people in Zanzibar particularly in Unguja Urban District. Three hundred and eighty-four euphemisms used in different social contexts were collected via questionnaires from the Swahili speakers - and then grouped according to the degree of their usage. Among the topics analyzed included; dead body, death, grave, burial, sexual organs, sexual act, semen, menstruation, defecation, male sexual organ, female sexual organ, and others. The study discovered that the highest euphemism was used in the subject of the dead body to replace taboo words followed by the theme of burial. Again, it reveals that people in Tanzania are more sensitive when discussing the emotive subject of dead bodies and burial. Therefore, they use euphemisms to avoid offending the face of the listener and to relax the conversation around dead body and burial.

Oyoko (2017) from Maseno University in Kenya conducted a lexicon-semantic analysis of selected obituaries in the Daily Nation newspaper. The objective of the study was to demonstrate how word classes contribute to the meaning-making process in obituaries. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate how the transitivity process aids in the instructive purpose of obituaries in which death is understood as a mental process. The research employed two main methods to collect data. Corpus compilation was used to extract lexical items of adjectives, verbs, nouns and adverbs from the sampled obituaries for analysis. The obituaries texts from the Daily Nation newspaper were also purposively identified and designated to provide data for analysis. This study was anchored on the theory of Systematic Functional Linguistics founded by Halliday in 1985. The researcher observed obituary as a method of advertisement and the language is done via euphemistic, praising, and consolatory strategies. The study used descriptive research design to describe and classify lexical items from the obituaries accurately without manipulating its original format. For the data analysis, the research opted for qualitative analysis. The sampled obituaries were critically analyzed from the lexico-semantic approach as well as via the processes of transitivity by the help of content analysis. The findings of the study showed that ordinary words can be used in obituary text context to give new meaning. The word choice contributed to the process of making meaning in the obituary by portraying death as an ordinary incident in the life of a person, thus ought to be acknowledged and cherished, sometimes as adversity.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed method research design was applied in the study. The study was conducted at Tangaza University– Nairobi County, students and both teaching and non-teaching staff, male and female respondents. The study targets the obituary texts in the Daily Nation newspaper in

Kenya. The study focused on both male and female third- and fourth-year English Literature students, along with teaching and non-teaching staff at Tangaza University, aged between twenty and seventy. 144 obituaries were purposively collected from 2020-2022. Twenty Daily Nation newspaper which were randomly sampled. The years when the country was coming to terms with the aftermath of coronavirus. A total number of forty-eight obituaries for each year was purposively sampled for the analysis given the time and resources which were available. Likewise, 108 questionnaires were sampled for the analysis. For this study, the researcher used, the questionnaire and the interview guide. The study use Content Analysis for the secondary data. Also Convergent mixed method was adopted for data analysis.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study engaged 108 participants, all of whom had experienced the death of a close relative. Of these, 57 (52.8%) were male and 51 (47.2%) were female, indicating a relatively balanced gender representation. This balance enabled the analysis of gender-related differences in the use and interpretation of euphemistic language during mourning.

Participants represented a wide range. The largest age group was 26-35, comprising 34 individuals (31.5%), followed by the 18-25 age group with 29 participants (26.9%). Those aged 36-45 accounted for 21 respondents (19.4%), while 17 participants (15.7%) were between 46 and 60 years old. The smallest group consisted of individuals over 60 years old, totaling 7 participants (6.5%). This distribution provided insights from both younger and older generations, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of evolving attitudes and expressions related death.

In terms of marital status, 58 respondents (53.7%) were single, 41(38.0%) were married, and 9 (8.3%) were either widowed or separated. These distinctions offered valuable insight into how emotional context and life experience may influence the interpretation and comfort drawn from euphemistic expressions during grief.

The respondents also represented a wide range of occupations within the Tangaza University community. Students formed the largest group with 45 respondents (41.7%), followed by non-teaching staff such as drivers, cleaners, security officers, chefs, and librarians at 37 (34.3%). Lecturers accounted for 15 of the respondents (13.9%), while 11 respondents (10.2%) worked in administrative roles. This occupational diversity enriched the study with varied perspectives shaped by both academic and non-academic experiences.

Educational backgrounds were equally varied. A significant number of participants held undergraduate degrees 38 (35.2%), while 33 (30.6%) had diploma-level qualifications. 22 respondents (20.4%) had completed secondary school, and 15 (13.9%) had attained postgraduate education. The range in education levels provided valuable depth in understanding how euphemistic language is processed, interpreted, and internalized across different levels of literacy and formal learning.

Religious affiliation also played a notable role. The majority of respondents identified as Catholic 59 (54.6%), while 35 (32.4%) were Protestant and 14 (13.0%) identified as Muslim. Each religious tradition brought with it unique cultural and theological understandings of death, which shaped how individuals interpreted phrases such as —*rested*,||

—*called to glory*,|| and —*celebration of life*.|| Importantly, every respondent had suffered the loss of someone close be it a parent, sibling, spouse, or child. This shared but deeply personal

experience added authenticity and depth to the responses, particularly in the in-depth interviews. One participant shared how the words in her mother's obituary —*celebration of life* helped her find peace. Another found comfort in the expression —*rested* rather than —*died* following the sudden loss of a brother. Such accounts highlighted how euphemisms serve not only a social function but a profoundly emotional one as well.

Table 1 presents the bio data and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. It has been categorized by gender, age, marital status, occupation, level of education, and religious affiliation. It illustrates the frequency and percentage distribution for each variable thus, providing a comprehensive overview of the sample population which was involved in the study.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	57	52.8%
	Female	51	47.2%
Age Range	18–25	29	26.9%
	26–35	34	31.5%
	36–45	21	19.4%
	46–60	17	15.7%
	Over 60	7	6.5%
Marital Status	Single	58	53.7%
	Married	41	38.0%
	Widowed/Separated	9	8.3%
Occupation	Student	45	41.7%
	Lecturer	15	13.9%
	Non-teaching Staff	37	34.3%
	Administrator	11	10.2%
Education Level	Secondary Education	22	20.4%
	Diploma	33	30.6%
	Undergraduate Degree	38	35.2%
	Postgraduate Degree	15	13.9%
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	59	54.6%
	Protestant	35	32.4%
	Muslim	14	13.0%

As indicated in the table, the demographic profile of the respondents reflects a balanced and diverse sample across key socio-demographic variables, with slightly more males than females. The majority aged 18–35, predominantly single which aligns with the high proportion of students in the sample. Most participants hold diploma or in the process of earning undergraduate degrees, and Catholicism is the most common religion. The high number of Catholic respondents may be largely attributed to Tangaza University being a Catholic-managed institution. Additionally, the majority of participants were students pursuing English literature. Since Tangaza University does not offer master's programs in literature or linguistics, most respondents were either diploma holders or individuals aiming to attain an undergraduate

degree. These characteristics provided a solid foundation for interpreting the study's findings within a well-represented population.

The graphs below display the biodata and socio-demographic profiles of the respondents. The information is categorized by gender, age, marital status, occupation, educational level, and religious affiliation. It presents both the frequency and percentage distribution for each variable, offering a detailed overview of the study's sample population.

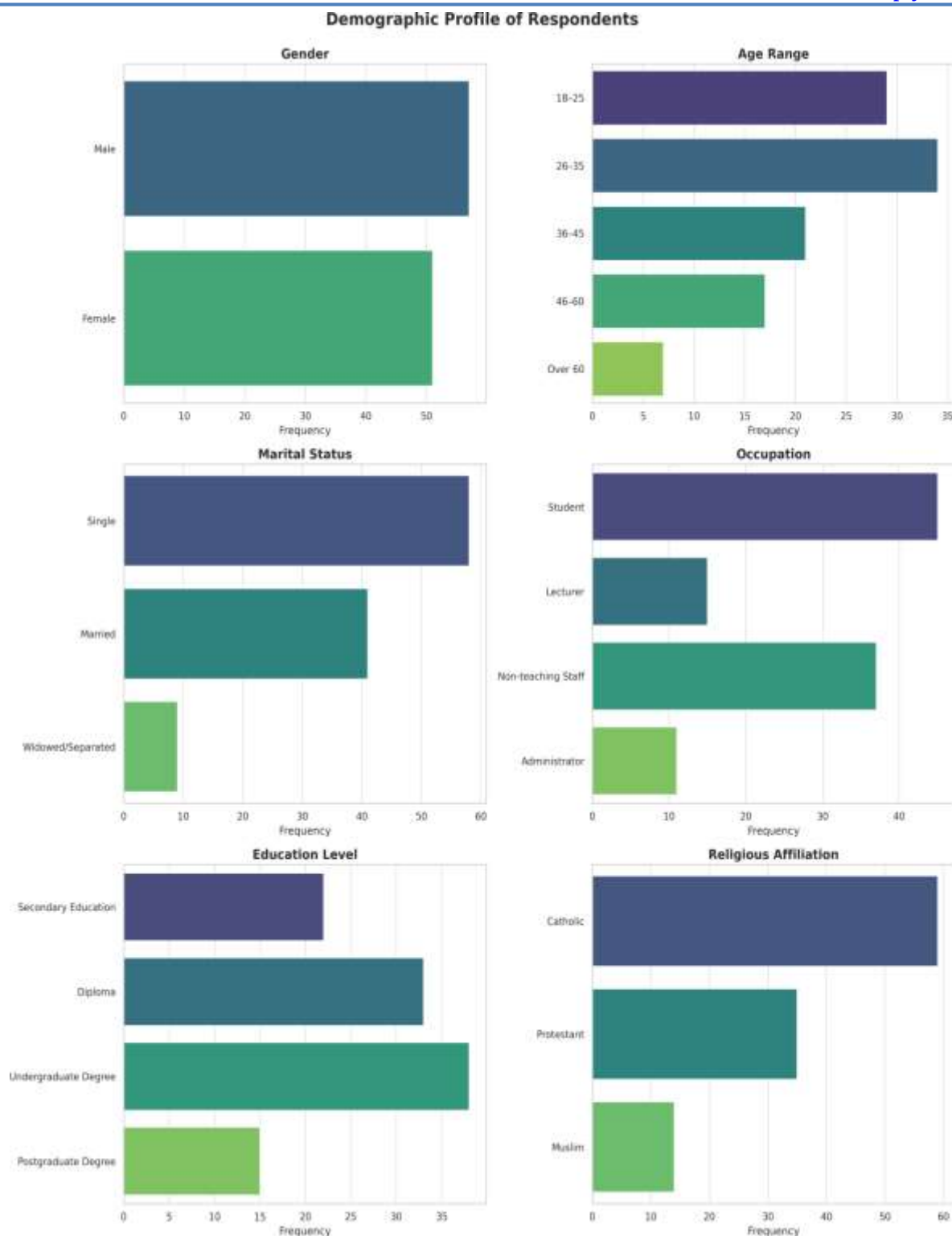


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

As observed by the graphs, the demographic profile of the respondents shows a balanced and diverse sample, with a slight male majority. Most participants were aged 18–35, predominantly single, and mainly students pursuing English literature. The majority were Diploma holders or working towards undergraduate degrees, as Tangaza University does not

offer master's programs in literature or linguistics. Catholicism was the most common religion, likely due to the university's Catholic affiliation. These characteristics provided a strong basis for analyzing the study's findings within a well-represented sample.

Common Euphemisms Used in Writing Obituaries

An in-depth analysis of 144 obituary notices published in the *Daily Nation* newspaper between 2020 and 2022 revealed a strong preference for euphemistic expressions in the announcement of death. Among the most frequently used were phrases such as —*passed on*,^{||} (42.4%) —*resting in peace*,^{||} (29.9%) and —*called to glory*,^{||} (20.1%). These phrases appeared repeatedly across obituaries of diverse individuals, reflecting a linguistic tendency to soften the finality of death.

The phrase —*passed on*,^{||} was by far the most common with 42.4%, appearing in more than half of the obituaries examined. Its usage reflects a conscious choice to avoid the direct and emotionally heavy term —*died*.^{||} This mirrors findings by Fernández (2015) who, in his study of Victorian-era Irish newspaper obituaries, noted that terms like —*passed on*,^{||} and —*embarked on the final journey*,^{||} were employed to cushion the emotional blow of death announcements. Like their Irish counterparts, Kenyan obituary writers appear to prefer gentler, metaphorical expressions to mitigate the emotional distress associated with loss.

Another commonly used phrase was —*called to glory*,^{||} (20.1%) which featured prominently in Christian contexts. This phrase encapsulates the belief in an afterlife and eternal peace, and its prevalence suggests a deep-rooted Christian influence on death-related language in Kenya. Similarly, —*gone to be with the Lord*,^{||} and —*promoted to glory*,^{||} were widely used, particularly in obituaries of individuals identified as active members of religious communities. This observation aligns with Herat's (2014) findings from Sri Lanka, where obituary euphemisms were shown to reflect local religious and cultural beliefs. In the Kenyan context, Christian ideologies appear to shape both how death is perceived and how it is communicated in public.

Other euphemisms observed included —*rested*,^{||} —*transitioned*,^{||} —*slept in the Lord*,^{||} and —*departed this life*.^{||} These terms suggest not an end, but a transition or continuation of existence in another realm, offering comfort to the bereaved by invoking images of peace and reunion. The frequent use of such language demonstrates not only a cultural sensitivity to grief but also a societal preference for expressions that convey hope, reverence, and dignity. This observation also resonates with Wira (2012) findings who analyzed the pre-cognitive view on euphemism among the linguists in American and Polish mainly on lexical field and the formation of euphemisms and acknowledged that the use of euphemisms is widely accepted as a way for individuals to discuss sensitive topics, such as the loss of a loved one

Respondents in the interviews reinforced these findings. One participant noted, —*The words _called to glory 'made me feel that my father's life had meaning beyond his physical death.*^{||} Another shared, —*Seeing the words _resting with the angels 'in my cousin's obituary gave me peace.*^{||} These reflections highlight the emotional and psychological function of euphemisms not simply as linguistic conventions, but as tools of healing and acceptance.

These findings reveal how Kenyan obituary language balances cultural respect, emotional sensitivity, and religious conviction. Euphemisms serve a social and spiritual role, allowing families and communities to honor the deceased with dignity while coping with grief. The consistent use of these expressions also points to a shared linguistic understanding of death one that avoids bluntness in favor of reverence and emotional care. As such, obituary writing in Kenya, like in many other societies, goes beyond mere announcement. It becomes a sacred

space where language is carefully selected to carry emotional weight, spiritual meaning, and collective comfort.

Table 2 below portrays the common euphemistic expressions used in Kenyan obituaries between 2020 and 2022, considering thematic meanings such as transition, rest, religious ascent, and references to the mystical or heavenly realm. It also pinpoints the frequency and percentage of each category. For this reason, they offer insight into how death is linguistically framed in Kenyan cultural and religious contexts.

Table 2: Common Euphemisms Found in Kenyan Obituaries (2020–2022)

Category	Euphemistic Expressions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Transition/Departure	Passed on, departed this life, transitioned	61	42.4%
Rest/Peace	Resting in peace, rested, slept in the Lord	43	29.9%
Religious Ascent	Called to glory, gone to be with the Lord, promoted to glory	29	20.1%
Mystical/Heavenly Realm	Resting with the angels, gone to eternal rest	11	7.6%

From the table above euphemisms related to transition and departure were the most commonly used expressions in Kenyan obituaries crafted in the Daily Nation newspaper from 2020-2022 accounting for over 40% of cases. Expressions emphasizing rest and peace also feature prominently, followed by those reflecting religious ascent and mystical or heavenly themes. The findings pinpoint the cultural and spiritual ways in which death is respectfully and sensitively communicated in Kenyan society.

The pie chart below is a representation of the commonly used euphemistic expressions found in Kenyan obituaries from 2020 to 2022, organized by themes such as transition, rest, religious ascent, and references to mystical or heavenly realms. It also highlights the frequency and percentage of each category. These expressions provide valuable insight into how death is linguistically represented within Kenyan cultural and religious settings.

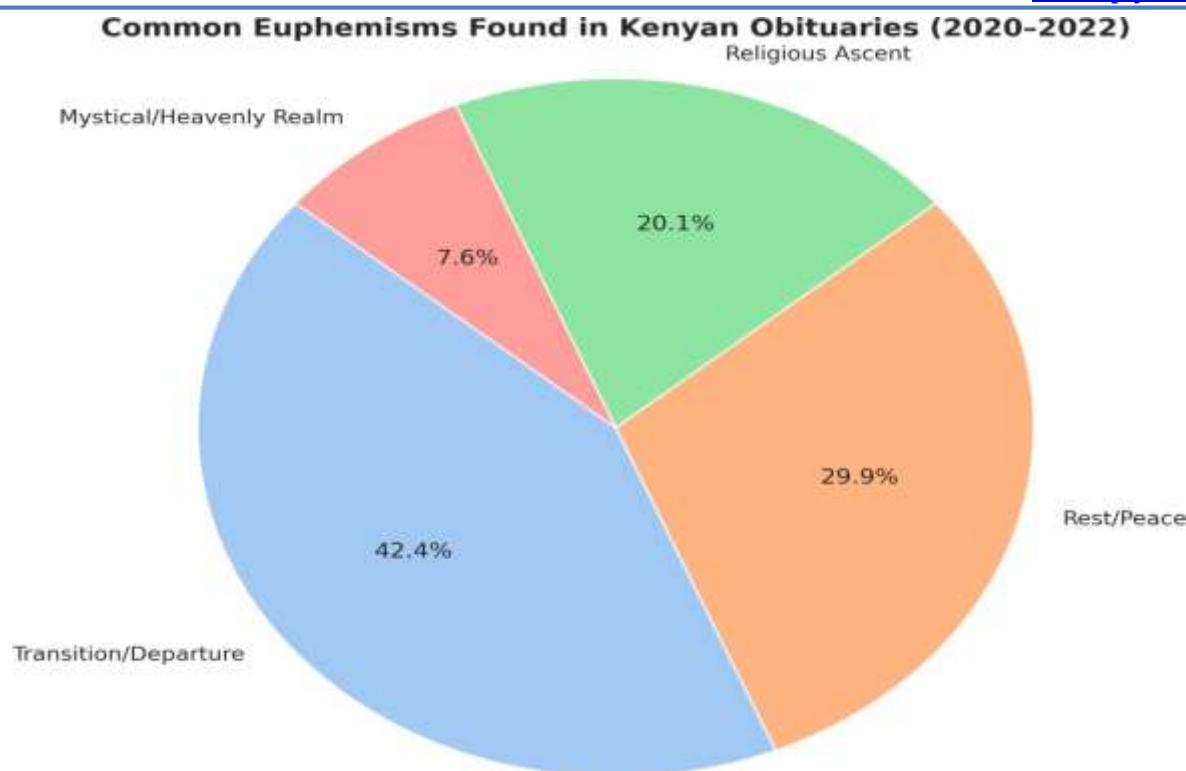


Figure 2: Common Euphemisms Found in Kenyan Obituaries (2020–2022)

Based on the pie chart above, euphemisms associated with transition and departure were the most frequently used expressions in Kenyan obituaries published in the *Daily Nation* newspaper between 2020 and 2022, representing over 40% of the cases. Phrases highlighting rest and peace were also commonly used, followed by those referencing religious ascent and mystical or heavenly themes. These findings reveal the cultural and spiritual approaches through which death is respectfully and thoughtfully expressed in Kenyan society.

Predominant Euphemistic Expressions in Obituaries (2020–2022)

This section addresses the first objective of the study: to identify and examine the most commonly used euphemistic expressions in obituaries published in the *Daily Nation* newspaper between the years 2020 and 2022. Through a systematic analysis of obituary texts, the study identified repeated patterns of word choice, particularly euphemistic verbs, phrasal verbs and phrases used to refer to death. These expressions serve a cultural and emotional function, reflecting societal values, spiritual beliefs, and the need to soften the harsh realities of death.

Euphemistic Verbs, phrasal verbs and Phrases: Frequency by Year

The most commonly used expression throughout the three years was —*passed on*, appearing 100 times in total. This phrase was often employed in both secular and religious obituaries, making it a generally accepted euphemism in Kenyan society. The second most frequent was —*resting in peace*, which appeared 81 times and typically concluded the obituary messages as a gesture of reverence. —*Called to glory*, —*gone to be with the Lord*, and —*promotion to glory* were all strongly rooted in Christian theological language and reflected the spiritual framing of death as a transition rather than an end. These expressions were particularly prevalent in obituaries referencing church affiliations or funerals held in religious contexts.

The sustained popularity of these verbs, phrasal verbs and phrases ‘points to their cultural significance. The language used in obituaries is often chosen to comfort the bereaved, reflect religious conviction, and offer a sense of continuity beyond death. For instance, one interviewee remarked: —*The phrase ‘promotion to glory’ reminded me that death is not an end but a new beginning*|| interview Respondent 10. Another participant noted how euphemisms functioned as emotional buffers during the initial shock of receiving death news:| *‘Passed on’ is respectful. It helps reduce the shock of the news.*| Interview

Respondent 2. These expressions were not simply stylistic choices but conveyed deeper meanings rooted in faith, respect for the deceased, and communal mourning practices. The frequent use of Christian terminology mirrored Kenya’s majority Christian population and indicated how religion continues to shape public discourse around death.

In conclusion, the data demonstrates that euphemistic expressions in obituaries are not only linguistic tools but also emotional and cultural mediators. They ease the pain of loss, preserve the dignity of the deceased, and uphold communal values of reverence and hope. By tracing the patterns of euphemism use across a three-year period, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how language functions within grief, spirituality, and identity in the Kenyan context.

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of specific euphemistic verbs, phrasal verbs and phrases in Daily Nation used in Kenyan obituaries from 2020 to 2022. It trails how often each euphemism appeared annually and cumulatively, highlighting the most commonly preferred term used to describe death over the three-year period.

Table 3: Frequency of Euphemistic Verbs, Phrasal Verbs and Phrases in Daily Nation Obituaries (2020–2022)

Euphemistic Expression	2020	2021	2022	Total	Percentage (%)
Passed on	36	33	31	100	23.3%
Resting in peace	24	27	30	81	18.8%
Called to glory	21	23	20	64	14.9%
Gone to be with the Lord	18	20	21	59	13.7%
Promotion to glory	15	16	19	50	11.6%
Departed this life	10	11	12	33	7.7%
Slept in the Lord	8	9	10	27	6.3%
Demise	5	6	5	16	3.7%

According to this table, the euphemism "Passed on" was the most commonly used phrase in Kenyan obituaries from 2020 to 2022, representing almost 25% of the total expressions. Other frequently used terms like "Resting in peace," "Called to glory," and "Gone to be with the Lord" also stood out, highlighting a focus on themes of peace and spirituality. Less frequently used expressions such as "Demise" were rare, suggesting a preference for language that is more soothing and spiritually meaningful when discussing death. It is important to notice that in the above table, certain euphemistic expression appeared repeatedly in the obituaries.

The histography below displays the frequency and percentage distribution of specific euphemistic verbs, phrasal verbs, and phrases used in Kenyan obituaries published in the Daily Nation newspaper between 2020 and 2022. It tracks the annual and total occurrences of each euphemism, identifying the most frequently used terms to refer to death over the three- year span.

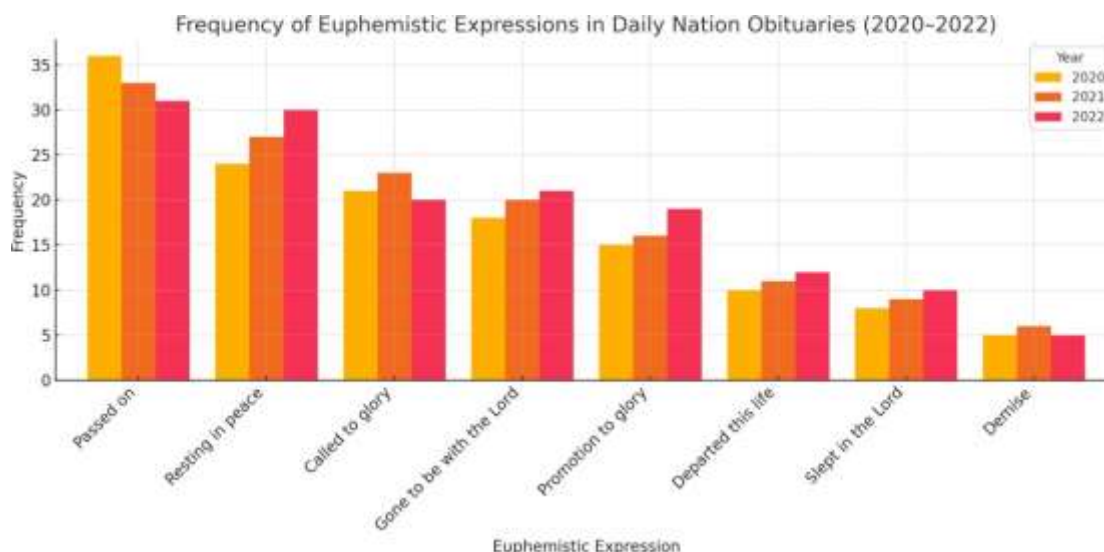


Figure 3: Frequency of Euphemistic Verbs, Phrasal Verbs and Phrases in Daily Nation newspaper 2020-2022

The histogram shows that "Passed on" was the most frequently used euphemism in Kenyan obituaries from 2020 to 2022, accounting for nearly 25% of all expressions. Other common phrases included "Resting in peace," "Called to glory," and "Gone to be with the Lord," reflecting a strong emphasis on peace and spirituality. Less commonly used terms like "Demise" indicate a preference for gentler, more comforting language when referring to death. Notably, some euphemistic expressions appeared repeatedly throughout the obituaries.

Cultural and Emotional Effects of Euphemisms on Readers

The emotional responses shared by respondents throughout this study clearly illustrate the powerful role that euphemistic expressions play in shaping how people process loss and grief. Many of those surveyed and interviewed revealed that they found comfort in softer, more spiritual language when confronted with death announcements. For example, phrases like *—resting in peace,* *—gone to be with the Lord,* or *—promotion to glory* were perceived as dignified and consoling, especially when compared to more direct expressions such as *—died* or *—death of.* This preference aligns with cultural values deeply rooted in respect, reverence, and hope for life beyond the grave.

These findings echo Hänggi's (2017) conclusion that euphemisms are not merely linguistic tools, but deeply cultural constructs. In the Kenyan context, where religion particularly Christianity plays a central role in shaping societal values and worldviews, euphemistic expressions often carry spiritual overtones. Participants noted that these phrases helped soften the blow of grief and allowed them to frame the passing of a loved one as a transition rather than a loss. The cultural appropriateness of such language was evident in both the interviews and the analysis of obituary texts, where spiritual references outnumbered clinical or secular terms.

For instance, one interview respondent shared how the phrase *—celebration of life* used in their mother's obituary helped them accept her passing with a sense of gratitude rather than despair. Another noted that reading *—rested* in place of *—died* brought comfort in a moment of profound shock. These emotional reactions show how euphemisms are not only stylistic

choices but also psychological aids that cushion the reader from emotional trauma.

The emotional function of euphemisms in Kenyan obituaries is also reflective of broader historical trends. Rappleyea (2021) observed that during wartime in London, obituaries were brief and direct often out of necessity. However, in the post-war years, the return to longer and more reflective obituaries marked a shift toward gentler, more personal language. A similar trend was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. The years 2020 to 2022 saw a noticeable increase in obituary length and in the use of euphemisms, perhaps driven by the widespread loss and collective mourning the country experienced. Families appeared to use euphemistic language not just to inform, but to honor and memorize their loved ones in ways that emphasized peace, spiritual rest, and continuation beyond death.

In this way, euphemisms functioned not only as polite or culturally acceptable alternatives, but also as emotional anchors during uncertain times. They enabled mourners and readers alike to engage with death in a way that upheld cultural values and supported emotional healing. This shows that the language we use in moments of loss carries both personal and communal significance, offering a bridge between grief and consolation.

Table 4 shows the frequency of various euphemistic verbs, phrasal verbs, and phrases used in Kenyan obituaries from 2020 to 2022, along with their associated emotional connotations. The table places an interest on how these expressions serve diverse purposes for instance providing spiritual reassurance, softening grief, showing respect, and offering comfort.

Table 4: Frequency of Euphemistic Expressions and Emotional Connotations in Kenyan Obituaries Published in the Daily Nation newspaper (2020–2022)

Year	Euphemistic Verbs/Phrasal verbs and Phrases	Frequency	Emotional Connotation
2020	Passing on	12	Spiritual reassurance, softening grief
	Demise	9	Politeness, reducing emotional distress
	Passed on	5	Neutral, politeness
	Humble acceptance of God's will	10	Respect, dignity, acceptance of loss
	Celebration of a life well lived	8	Comfort, honoring the deceased
	Promotion to glory	7	Spiritual reassurance, hope for afterlife
2021	Passing on	12	Spiritual reassurance, softening grief
	Demise	8	Politeness, reducing emotional distress
	Promotion to glory	6	Spiritual reassurance, hope for afterlife
	Humble acceptance of God's will	9	Respect, dignity, acceptance of loss
	Celebration of life well lived	7	Comfort, honoring the deceased
2022	Passing on	15	Spiritual reassurance, softening grief
	Demise	8	Politeness, reducing emotional distress
	Promotion to glory	8	Spiritual reassurance, hope for afterlife
	Celebration of life	6	Comfort, honoring the deceased
	Humble acceptance of God's will	5	Respect, dignity, acceptance of loss

The table revealed that "Passing on" was the most frequently used euphemism between 2020-2022 to craft obituaries in the Daily Nation newspaper. It provided spiritual comfort and easing grief. Other common phrases highlighted politeness, respect, hope, and acceptance of loss, while expressions celebrating a life well lived offered comfort. All in all, these euphemisms reflect Kenyan cultural values of dignity, compassion, and spiritual solace in obituaries.

The histography below presents the frequency of different euphemistic verbs, phrasal verbs, and phrases used in Kenyan obituaries between 2020 and 2022, alongside their emotional connotations. The table emphasizes how these expressions fulfill various roles, such as offering spiritual comfort, easing the pain of loss, conveying respect, and providing emotional support to the bereaved.

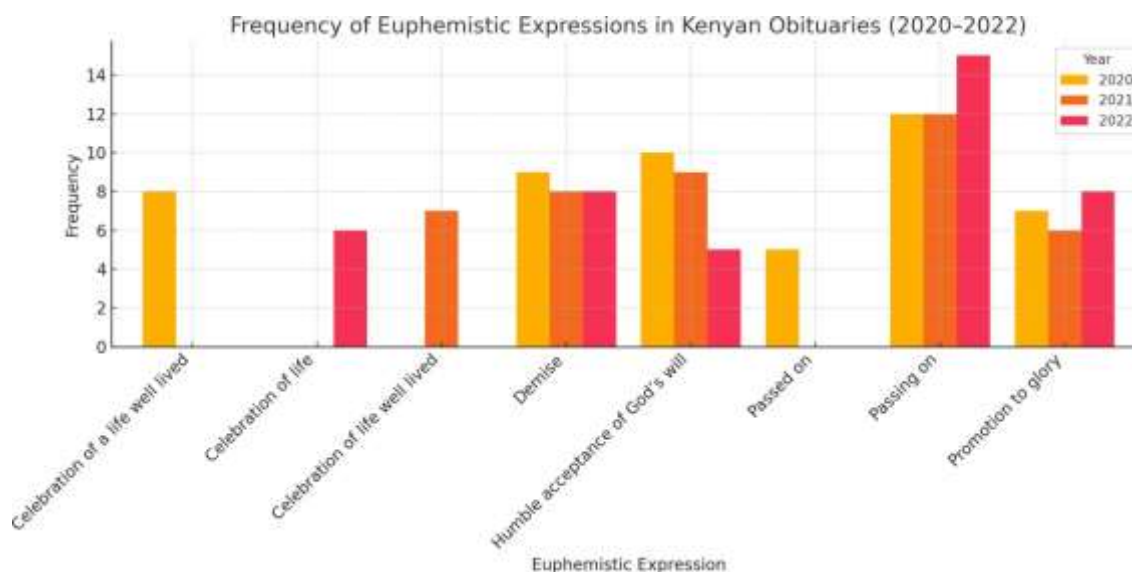


Figure 4: Frequency of Euphemistic Expressions and Emotional Connotations in Kenyan Obituaries published in the Daily Nation newspaper (2020 –2022)

The histography revealed that "Passing on" was the most commonly used euphemism in *Daily Nation* obituaries from 2020 to 2022, often serving to provide spiritual comfort and help ease grief. Other frequently used phrases conveyed politeness, respect, hope, and acceptance of loss, while those that celebrated a life well lived offered additional comfort to the bereaved. Overall, these euphemisms reflect Kenyan cultural values that emphasize dignity, compassion, and spiritual reassurance in the way death is communicated.

Most Preferred Euphemisms for Obituaries

The respondents' preferences for certain euphemisms like *—resting in eternal peace*, *—called to glory*, and *—celebration of life* reveal a deep connection to the cultural and religious values that shape how Kenyans view death. These euphemisms are not just phrases; they carry emotional weight and reflect a strong cultural belief in a peaceful transition to a better place after death. For many, these expressions offer comfort, as they frame death as a serene and hopeful passage rather than an end.

This preference aligns with what Herat (2014) observed about the role of cultural and religious contexts in shaping how people talk about death. In Kenya, where Christianity is a dominant influence, death is often viewed not as a finality but as a transition to eternal peace or a higher existence. Terms like *—resting in eternal peace* or *—called to glory* carry a sense of reverence and spiritual continuity, which resonates with the values and worldview of many Kenyans. These euphemisms embody hope, comfort, and the promise of a better life beyond the grave.

Interestingly, the findings of this study slightly diverge from those of Hanggi (2017), who noted that German euphemisms are often more formal and secular, focusing less on spirituality. In contrast, Kenyan obituaries are distinctly more spiritual and focused on the afterlife. This suggests that while euphemisms can serve as universal tools for softening the harshness of death, their specific forms and emotional tones are shaped by the unique cultural and religious contexts of the people using them.

The preferences expressed in this study also echo Fernández's (2015) observation about Christian symbolism in Irish obituaries. In both cases, death is not merely acknowledged as an event but is celebrated as a transition that connects the living to the divine. This celebration of life, through phrases like —*celebration of life* or —*promotion to glory*,¹ emphasize the cultural tendency to honor the deceased not with sorrow but with gratitude for their life and their journey to a better place.

Table 5 is a presentation of the most preferred euphemisms used in obituaries published in the Daily Nation newspaper from 2020-2022 in conjunction with their frequency, percentage of use, and allied emotional significance. Similarly, it demonstrates how different expressions convey comfort, spiritual hope, respect, and peaceful acceptance all which echoes the ways in which obituaries aim to honor the deceased and provide solace to the bereaved.

Table 5: Most Preferred Euphemisms for Obituaries and Their Emotional Significance

Euphemism	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Emotional Significance
Resting in Eternal Peace	25	19.2%	Comfort, peace, hope for the afterlife
Called to Glory	22	16.9%	Spiritual transition, honor, divine connection
Celebration of Life	20	15.4%	Gratitude, honoring the deceased, uplifting tone
Promotion to Glory	18	13.8%	Spiritual elevation, peaceful transition to a better life
Gone to be with the Lord	15	11.5%	Peace, divine assurance, religious hope
Rested	12	9.2%	Softening grief, acceptance, a gentle passing
Passed on	10	7.7%	Politeness, gentleness, respect for the deceased
Departed	8	6.2%	Quiet acceptance, peaceful departure

Given the analysis from table 5, the phrase "Resting in Eternal Peace" is the most commonly favored expression in obituaries, highlighting themes of comfort, tranquility, and hope for life beyond death. Other prevalent expressions like "Called to Glory" and "Celebration of Life" convey ideas of spiritual passage, respect, and appreciation. Jointly, these euphemisms reflect a cultural emphasis on providing consolation, dignity, and positive remembrance to honor those who have passed and to aid those who mourn come to term with the loss of their loved ones.

This table further illustrates the emotional significance attached to each euphemism, highlighting how they serve as tools for emotional coping during moments of grief. The phrases preferred by respondents show a common desire to find peace in the face of loss, with euphemisms helping to reframe death as part of a broader, spiritual journey rather than an abrupt end. In this study, it's clear that Kenyan euphemisms are more than linguistic choices they are emotional shields, providing comfort and helping individuals come to terms with loss. This preference reflects a collective understanding of death not as an isolated event, but as a part of a larger spiritual narrative, one that is deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs.

Figure 5 presents the most commonly preferred euphemisms used in obituaries published in the *Daily Nation* newspaper between 2020 and 2022, along with their frequency, usage

percentage, and associated emotional meanings. It also illustrates how these various expressions convey comfort, spiritual hope, respect, and peaceful acceptance, reflecting the ways in which obituaries seek to honor the deceased and offer comfort to the grieving.

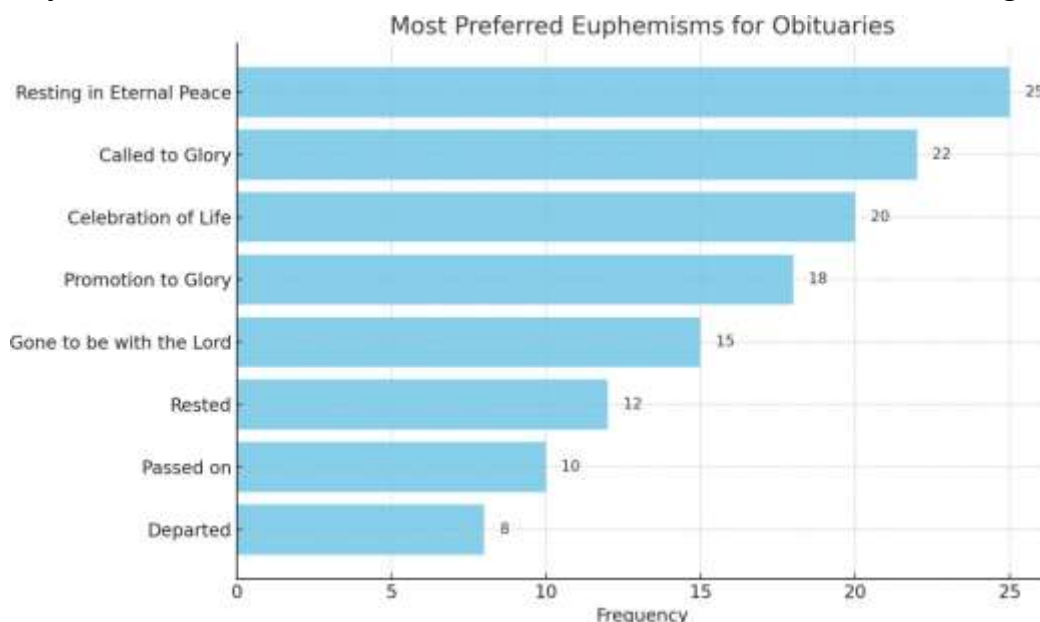


Figure 5: Most Preferred Euphemisms for Obituaries published in the Daily Nation newspaper and Their Emotional Significance

Based on the analysis from Table 5, the phrase "Resting in Eternal Peace" emerged as the most frequently preferred expression in obituaries, emphasizing themes of comfort, serenity, and hope for an afterlife. Other commonly used phrases, such as "Called to Glory" and "Celebration of Life," convey messages of spiritual transition, respect, and gratitude. Together, these euphemisms highlight a cultural focus on offering consolation, preserving dignity, and fostering positive remembrance to both honor the deceased and help the bereaved cope with their loss.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Predominant Euphemistic Expressions in Obituaries Published in the Daily Nation Newspaper between 2020-2022

One of the most striking findings from the obituary analysis was the consistent and deliberate use of euphemistic language in reporting death. Rather than using blunt or clinical terms like —died, obituary writers in the *Daily Nation* often opted for expressions that were gentler and more respectful. Among the most frequently used verbs and phrasal verbs were —passed on appearing 39 times (27.1%), —demise 25 times (17.4%), —promotion to glory 11 times (7.7%), and —passed away 5 times (3.5%). These expressions were selected for their ability to soften the starkness of death, making the news more palatable for both the bereaved and the wider readership.

In addition to verbs, several full phrases stood out for their poetic and spiritual resonance. —Promotion to glory appeared as a standalone phrase 21 times (14.6%), while —humble acceptance of God's will 19 times (13.2%), and —celebration of a life well lived 18 times (12.5%) were also common. These phrases reflected not only a linguistic preference for gentler

terms but also a deeper cultural and spiritual perspective that frames death as a continuation of life or a return to the Divine.

Emotional and Psychological Effects of Euphemisms

The emotional and psychological impact of euphemistic language was another important theme that emerged from both the questionnaire and interview responses. A significant majority approximately 89% of the questionnaire participants expressed the view that euphemisms helped ease the emotional burden associated with the death of a loved one. Many respondents described euphemistic language as being comforting, uplifting, and instrumental in helping them to begin processing their grief.

Interview and questionnaire participants spoke candidly about their experiences, often using metaphors to describe the soothing effects of these expressions. One respondent likened euphemism to a topical balm, stating: —*Euphemism words are like pharماسal on an aching joint. They console and comfort the bereaved*|| interviewee 7. Another interviewee reflected on the gentleness of such language, saying: —*Passed on is respectful and gentle; it helps us face the reality calmly*|| interviewee 5. These sentiments illustrate that the choice of words in obituary writing is not merely cosmetic but profoundly affects how death is perceived and experienced, particularly in its immediate aftermath.

Reader Interpretation and Preferred Euphemisms

In addition to their emotional impact, euphemisms were also evaluated in terms of how they were interpreted and preferred by readers of obituaries. When respondents were asked to identify the expressions, they found most appropriate and comforting, several euphemisms emerged as favorites. The most commonly preferred included: —*resting in peace*,|| appearing 25 times (19.2%) —*called to glory*,|| 22 times (16.9%) —*celebration of life*,||20 times (15.4%) —*promotion to glory*,|| 18 times (13. %) —*gone to be with the Lord*,|| 15 times (11.5%) *rested*, 12 times (9.2%) *passed on*, 10 times (7.7%) and —*departed*.|| (6.2%) These phrases were consistently described as more respectful, hopeful, and spiritually resonant than direct language. They were not only simply seen as alternatives to the word —*died*,|| but as expressions that affirm the dignity of the deceased, while also offering reassurance and spiritual meaning to those left behind. By portraying death as a transition or homecoming, such language helps the bereaved conceptualize their loss within a larger framework of faith and continuity. Moreover, the preference for euphemistic expressions suggests a broader cultural tendency toward language that preserves emotional well-being and fosters a shared sense of respect and compassion. In this way, the use of euphemisms in obituaries serves not only an informational purpose but also a ritual and relational one, binding together the community of mourners through shared symbols of hope, honor, and remembrance.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of euphemistic language in obituary writing within the Kenyan context, using obituaries published in the *Daily Nation* between 2020 and 2022 as a primary point of reference. In doing so, the research also sought to understand how this type of language affects those who are grieving, as well as the general readership of such notices. Over the course of the investigation, it became clear that euphemisms serve multiple essential functions that go far beyond mere stylistic preference.

To gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher adopted a mixed methods approach, which allowed for the integration of both quantitative and

qualitative data. Specifically, the study drew on three sources: a content analysis of 144 obituaries randomly selected from *Daily Nation* publications over a three-year period; 108 completed questionnaires collected from students and staff both teaching and subordinate of Tangaza University; and 10 in-depth interviews with individuals who had experienced the loss of a close family member. These sources combined to paint a rich and multifaceted picture of how euphemisms operate within the space of public mourning and private grief.

The interpretation of these findings was framed within the Politeness Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which argues that individuals often adjust their language to minimize discomfort, preserve dignity, and maintain social cohesion. In the case of death announcements, euphemistic expressions such as —*passed on*‖, —*promoted to glory*‖, and —*rested*‖ allow mourners to communicate loss without inflicting additional emotional pain on themselves or others. The theory provided a valuable lens through which to interpret the functions of these expressions, revealing them as tools of social politeness, emotional cushioning, and cultural respect (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Several core conclusions emerged from the study. First, euphemisms offer emotional and psychological comfort, serving as a linguistic buffer that helps individuals process grief more gently. Rather than facing the finality suggested by blunt terms like —*died*‖ or —*was killed*‖, the bereaved are offered language that softens the loss and provides space for healing.

Secondly, euphemistic language in Kenyan obituaries reflects deep cultural and religious sensitivity. Expressions used in public notices often align with Christian and African traditions that view death not as an end but as a transition to another life. Words such as —*celebration of life*‖ and —*gone to be with the Lord*‖ embody communal values and shared beliefs in the continuity of the human spirit.

Last but not least, these expressions carry spiritual significance, reaffirming collective faith in an afterlife and providing reassurance to the bereaved that their loved ones have journeyed on to another life. For many respondents, euphemisms are not simply linguistic softeners—they are affirmations of hope, belonging, and divine order.

Finally, the study revealed that euphemisms play a central role in maintaining social and linguistic politeness. In a context where mourning is both a private and a communal experience, such expressions help maintain decorum, uphold the dignity of the deceased, and signal empathy for those left behind. Thus, euphemistic language in Kenyan obituary writing is not a matter of mere convention. It is a deeply embedded cultural and emotional necessity a reflection of collective values, spiritual beliefs, and the human need for kindness in the face of mortality. Through carefully chosen words, communities are able to mourn with grace, preserve dignity, and extend compassion, even in the most difficult moments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

The study suggests that media practitioners and newspaper editors promote the use of emotionally intelligence and culturally sensitive euphemistic language in crafting obituaries in the *Daily Nation* newspaper. It also recommends that the family writing obituaries to choose expressions that reflects the spirit, beliefs, values and personality of the deceased. Likewise, the study recommends the introduction of euphemisms analysis into language and literature curricular as a tool for teaching stylistics and disclose analysis.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the Sisters of our Lady of the Missions (RNDM) and the Next Generation Leadership Program (NGLP).

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