**Linguistic Forms and Communicative Strategies** **of Machinga Interaction with Customers: A Sociolinguistic Analysis**

**Abstract**

The analysis of linguistic forms and communicative strategies in business ignored factors such as the nature of business and customers’ behaviour by primarily focusing on communication procedures involved and that take place in trading structures. This study analyses Machinga’s (Petty-traders) language practices by specifically studying their linguistic forms and communicative strategies when engaging in small enterprises. The study is informed by the Speech Act Theory developed by John Austin in 1962. This study was conducted in three (3) wards of the Mbinga District, namely Masumuni, Mbinga ‘A’, and Mbinga ‘B’. A qualitative approach and case study design were adopted. The purposive sampling technique was employed. The data were collected through observing and recording conversations between petty-traders and their customers in Mbinga District between February and May, 2024 and analysed thematically. The collected data were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes and patterns. The findings revealed that petty-traders in Mbinga District use linguistic forms and communicative strategies such as loan words, code mixing, accent, parallelism, poor sentence structure, phrases, and registers to facilitate business communication with their customers. These data present the great role of language in business interactions and portray the interlocutors’ sense of community membership. The study concluded that petty traders (Maching) in Mbinga District utilise a range of linguistic forms, such as phrases, syntax, parallelism, grammar, and lexicon, alongside various communicative strategies like code mixing and switching, borrowing, word choices, accent, and tone. These language practices are important in the business contexts and should be nurtured and acknowledged, as language plays a crucial role in promoting socioeconomic development within the speech community. The study advocates for educational institutions in collaboration with local government to adopt short courses in business communication skills, intending to fulfill the language needs of petty traders. Capacity building programmes would enhance their language skills and ultimately promote appropriate communication in marketing and business.

**Keywords**: Machinga, Linguistic forms, Communicative strategies, Customers, Business, Interaction, Mbinga, Petty-traders.

# Introduction

Language is a remarkable process of linking sounds and words to perform meaningful speech. Languages are sometimes receptive, based on what the receptor understands. They can also be expressive, which is the complexity of all speech elements to produce meaningful expressions (Hanan & Kuwai, 2023). Linguistic forms refer to the structural aspects of language including grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology and lexical choices (Pllana, 2020). Communicative strategies are techniques used by speakers to achieve effective communication, especially when dealing with linguistic and contextual challenges (Yuliandri, 2019). Linguistic forms and communicative strategies in the business context are not a dichotomy, they perform the same functions (Malyuga & Tomalin, 2017).

Barat and Talukder (2023) conducted a study in Bangladesh to explore the impact of language proficiency on business interactions, and suggested that strong skills in both written and spoken language can significantly enhance communication in business transactions. This implies that effective language use enables people to navigate the complexities of business interactions more efficiently, facilitating smoother exchanges. This is in line with Koczian and Gubiniová (2020) who argue that in the context of business communication, traders deliberately select appropriate linguistic forms and communicative strategies to meet the specific demands of business competition. Previous research has investigated the role of linguistic or communication styles in various settings and from different angles. For example, in the context of consumer-brand interactions on social media, a brand’s tone of voice has an effect on consumers’ brand trust and purchase intentions (Fan *et al*., 2023). These communicative strategies are essential in promoting business visibility and guaranteeing effective negotiation and collaboration in competitive environments.

The word "Machinga" in the Tanzanian context is understood from two different perspectives. One interpretation suggests that the term originated in Lindi District, located in the Lindi Region, where Mount Lichinga is situated, and it is believed that individuals from the southern part of Tanzania are associated with this area (Sakamoto & Sakamoto, 2020). Another idea is that the word "Machinga" is derived from the combination of two English words: ‘marching’ and ‘guys,’ meaning the act of vendors marching from door to door, often referred to as hawkers (John, 2024). In Tanzania, petty traders, or "Machinga," have developed a unique form of language that not only enhances their credibility in business transactions but also contributes to business transformation in the country. These traders, during their selling process, employ specific linguistic forms and communicative strategies, which significantly strengthen their bargaining power and influence in the marketplace (Ogawa, 2006).

Dzogovic *et al*. (2022) observed that businessmen in the Republic of Kosovo were aware of the significant role language management plays in international business, including the importance of mastering a common language or lingua franca to effectively interact with people from other countries, as it smoothens business exchanges. Similarly, Agustina *et al*. (2024) in their study explored the role of English as a lingua franca in international business, and highlighted the importance of a shared language for conducting global transactions. They informed that the use of a common language allows for consistent communication, which in turn, facilitates smoother conversations and contributes to business growth. Small enterprises, such as petty traders, play a dominant role in the economies of many developing countries, particularly in trade and industry (Sukkar *et al*., 2021). For most urban dwellers, small businesses are seen as a hub of income generation, particularly for those without formal employment (Fitina & Mushi, 2024).

According to the Bank of Tanzania (BOT, 2024), the trade sector contributed 8.3% of the Tanzanian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024. In contrast, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) contributed a more considerable 27-35% of the country's overall GDP, with SMEs representing more than 90% of businesses in Tanzania. These enterprises employ over 5 million people in Tanzania (SMEs, 2024). Furthermore, SMEs play an important role in providing livelihood opportunities, particularly for the youth, and serve as a foundational source of income (URT, 2019). The dominance of small-scale trade with business activities has significantly risen in urban areas, towns, city centres, and junctions. In Tanzania, for instance, "Machinga" have found opportunities to sell their goods, and their operations have gained a degree of formalisation in certain areas (George *et al*., 2022).

Moreover, language skills and communication strategies used by petty traders are important to the achievement of their operations. These traders utilise effective communication techniques to market products and interact with customers, which promotes sales and contributes to both local authorities' revenue and individual income (Mkumbo & Mfugale, 2024). Scholars emphasise that whenever linguistic forms and communication strategies are employed successfully in business interactions, they increase sales and exchanges (Dzogovic *et al*., 2022). In this regard, this study analysed how petty traders (Machinga) use language to engage with their customers. The analysis specifically focused on the linguistic forms and communicative strategies employed by Machinga to ensure effective communication in their businesses.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research on petty traders (Machinga) has predominantly focused on the transactional aspects of buying and selling, often neglecting the language factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of business operations and interactions, such as linguistic forms and communicative strategies (Suprayogi *et al*., 2024). However, the extent to which these linguistic forms and communicative strategies influence effective communication in business transactions remains unclear (Atadjanova & Kurbanova, 2023). Analyses of research in this area often highlight the narrow scope of studies, particularly regarding the persuasive role of language in business competition, advertising, marketing, and branding (Eriksson, 2022; Chea, 2024).

Researchers such as Talukder and Rasmussen (2024) argue that language deficiency leads to barriers in small and medium-sized enterprises. Nisa (2022) and Nagórka (2024) describe the roles and impacts of code switching, code mixing and borrowing in business interactions, while Barat and Talukder (2023) described the impact of language in business. These perceptions highlight a noticeable gap in understanding the linguistic dynamics of petty traders in regions such as Mbinga District. This gap can be addressed by investigating the linguistic forms and communicative strategies used by petty traders (Machinga), which could potentially eliminate language barriers in business interactions, thus increasing sales. Judijanto (2025) and Jacobs (2025) further argue that language should not be perceived simply as a communication tool but as an instrument of business strategy. Effective language use can change communication strategies and enhance interactions between sellers and buyers. Therefore, this study analysed the linguistic forms and communicative strategies employed in conversations between petty traders (Machinga) and their customers in Mbinga District.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted the Speech Act Theory founded by John L. Austin in 1962, and further extended by John Searle in 1979. Austin basically offers a summary of William James lectures which were presented at Harvard University in 1955. Austin’s assumption relies on “how to do things with words” which is an attempt to replace the origin difference between constative and performative. Constative is the utterance of saying which can be either true or false. Performative is the utterance of doings that can serve the effect or constitute the performance, from the verb “perform” (Austin, 1962).

However, Austin declares contradictions on his ideology attached to constative and performative, claiming that all utterances of saying are doings (Austin, 1962). Currently, Austin argues that not all utterances can be true or false, by diluting his idea of constative and performative into three acts, namely locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary, which are the central focus of the utterances (Austin, 1975). Locutionary act is the act of saying something in the full sense of say (Coulthard, 1985). It is the basic act of producing meaningful linguistic expressions. Illocutionary act reflects the speaker’s purpose and the intention in saying something. In addition, perlocutionary act reveals the act performed by or as a result of saying (Coulthard, 1985).

Austin’s theory of Speech Acts provides a base for analysing utterances, yet he was unclear about the illocutionary concept, because a single utterance can express more than one illocutionary force (Isaac *et al*., 2020). Despite this limitation, the theory remains useful to the study. The strength of the Speech Act Theory originates from its ability to unpack utterances that should perform an act (Reiland, 2024). The linguistic forms and communicative strategies are reflected through the utterances used as they perform acts when selling and buying of commodities at the markets. The theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the linguistic forms and communicative strategies that are employed when petty traders interact with their customers.

**Empirical Literature Review**

Effective business interactions depend on individual’s ability to use linguistic forms and communicative strategies (Yashan, 2024). These aspects facilitate business communication, enhancing selling and buying goods among the interlocutors at the market place and any business centres (Szenes, 2021).

**Linguistic Forms and Communicative Strategies**

Linguistic form refers to the structure of language, including elements such as grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology, and lexical choices (Cureton, 2001). Crystal and Alan, in their Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, describe language forms as the different aspects that make up language (Crystal & Alan, 2023). Communication strategies are defined by Færch and Kasper (1980) as the methods individuals use to address communicative problems, along with the cooperative or non-cooperative solutions they pursue. These strategies are discussed in terms of discourse, involving the concept of conditional relevance. As such, code-mixing, code-switching, and borrowing play important roles in this study. Both linguistic forms and communicative strategies are significant in enhancing business communication and branding (Alanazi et al., 2025).

Ayeni (2021) argues that language strategies involve techniques used by speakers to facilitate effective communication, especially when dealing with linguistic or contextual challenges. Linguistic forms and communication strategies enhance human thoughts and facilitate communication, with the content of utterances and the communicative intent being central to the nature of human language (Wiltschko, 2022).

**Grammar and Syntax in Business Conversations**

Dzogovic *et al*., (2022)conducted a study on the importance of language management in international business in the Republic of Kosovo. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, with data collected from natural settings and processed using IBM SPSS statistics. The findings indicated that language barriers in international business necessitate improvements in language knowledge and skills for effective management. Adaptation of new language yields positive results, with a clear connection between proficiency in one or more foreign languages, including grammar and syntax, and business success in an international environment.

Mostafiz and Alam (2022) and Barat and Talukder (2023) examined the impacts of English language proficiency on business in Bangladesh. The study used the Concentric Circle model, the data were collected and analysed quantitatively from natural settings. It was revealed that knowledge of linguistic forms such as syntax and phonetics enables effective communication in the global business world despite the challenges related to various forms of English worldwide. The mastery of English is indispensable in business operations as it empowers people to engage confidently with international business partners and fosters connections worldwide.

Manvender (2015) conducted a descriptive study on syntax in a business context in Malaysia. The study was guided by The BMELC Learner Corpus Compilation model. Data were drawn from a sample corpus. The findings indicated that second-language (L2) businessmen struggled with English, demonstrating poor grammar, omitting articles, forming long sentences, writing as if speaking, and translating sentences directly from their first language (L1).

Wijaya *et al.*, (2023) conducted a study on Indonesian students' ability to write business documents, such as product descriptions and business letters. The study focused on errors and the types of English sentence structures in descriptive paragraphs. The study employed a quantitative case study approach, in which data were collected from descriptive paragraphs. The findings indicated that students primarily used simple sentence structures, along with compound and complex sentences. Errors were minimal, including issues like addition, misformation, omission, and misordering.

Agustina *et al.,* (2024) explored the role of English proficiency as a lingua franca in international business. The study used a qualitative methodology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that higher proficiency in English, specifically in grammar, enhances business outcomes. Nonetheless, cross-cultural communication barriers often complicate international transactions, highlighting the importance of not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural awareness in global business interactions.

# Morphology and Phonology in Business Conversations

Bourdin *et al.* (2024)analysed regional and standard accent in commercial and non-commercial contexts in the Netherlands. The study was guided by sociolinguistic theory and used quantitative data collected from the radio and television on the two types of accents. The findings indicated that commercial versus non-commercial context had no effect on the evaluation of standard and regional accents. Regional accent was evaluated more negatively than a standard accent for the majority of measures. Attitudes towards the speaker such as competence, status, comprehensibility, attitude towards the product, and perceived realism of the log. These findings indicate that a regional accent is a potent negative cue across these contexts, overriding possible effects that are specific to commercial contexts.

Nasab and Mehrazeen (2022) analysed the tone of market participants via social media opinions. The study was guided by a multivariate regression model, and quantitative data collected from the tweets of different participants. The findings showed that there was a relationship between the tone of existing earnings tweets and bid-ask spreads. These results provide complementary awareness in capital markets through the use of positive tone.

Altany *et al.* (2025) conducted a study on the role of linguistic tone in small trade. The primary aim of the study was to explore whether investors, particularly small investors, have differing opinions on the valuation implications of linguistic tone and whether these investors are subject to differential behavior in trade. It utilised a financial linguistic model, with data collected and analyzed from archival sources. The findings showed that the buying behavior of small investors was positively associated with residual tone, while larger investors tended to sell based on this signal. The study enlightens that linguistic tone plays a significant role in influencing business decisions, highlighting its impact on investor behavior in financial markets.

Sari (2021) analysed the word formation process in business, particularly in online newspapers in Antara. The study utilised a descriptive qualitative method, with data consisting of words extracted from newspapers and online sources that featured the process of forming English words. The findings revealed that derivationwas the most common word formation process in business interactions. However, the study did not identify other word formation processes such as blendingor clippingas prevalent processes in the examined texts.

Susilawati (2018) carried out a study on the word register used by traditional traders at the Floating Market in Banjarmasin City, Indonesia. The study used a qualitative approach, with data collected through documentation, observation, recording, and note-taking techniques. The findings indicated that the word register used by traders at the market was influenced by the unique environment of the floating market. The study identified that verbs, nouns, and adjectives were particularly affected by this influence. Adjectives commonly found in the trading context at Banjarmasin’s floating market included terms such as "less," "cheap," "sweet," and "run out," reflecting the language used to describe products and transactions in the market setting.

# Lexical Choices in Business Conversations

Martins (2012) claimed that it is important to select words carefully before speaking, asserting that effective communication hinges on choosing words that the receiver will understand and respond to appropriately. The ability to select words successfully, aided by tools like a dictionary or thesaurus, plays a significant role in facilitating effective business communication, particularly in marketplace settings.

Sombuntham and Wang (2021) conducted a study in Thailand on how lexicon functions as a brand. It employed a qualitative research approach and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The results showed that a well-chosen lexicon can function as both an organizational brand and an identity for a business. The findings of this nature enlighten that the stability of firms mainly depends on the lexicon the company adopts. This highlights the strategic importance of language in shaping a company's public image and long-term success.

Aini and Simatupang (2024) conducted a study to investigate the role of positive politeness in business communication using a qualitative method for data analysis. It was found that positive politeness is fundamental in business in fostering respectful rapport, enhancing trust through reassurances, and mitigating conflicts. These strategies build successful relationships, promote effective interactions, and contribute to the overall success of business communication. Specifically, positive politeness helps to facilitate collaboration, build trust, promote transparency, enhance customer satisfaction, assert reciprocity, and maintain positive relationships. Thus, politeness plays an important role in influencing one's decision to engage in conversation and in shaping the dynamics of business communication.

**Code switching, Code mixing, and Borrowing in Business Conversations**

According to Beletskaya (2018), Nisa (2022), Sulistyo *et al.* (2023) and Nagórka (2024), studies on code mixing and code switching in business contexts have highlighted their prevalent use in transactions. Through descriptive qualitative research, data were collected using audio recording, observation, and in-depth interviews with participants. The results showed that the form of code switching commonly observed in buying and selling activities involves a shift between languages, such as switching from Javanese to Indonesian. In contrast, code mixing was found to involve the blending of Javanese and Indonesian languages within the same conversation. Additionally, the research indicated that factors such as, gender, age, and ethnicity significantly influence the occurrence of code mixing and code switching in interactions between sellers and buyers.

**Methodology**

**Area of the Study**

This study was conducted in Mbinga District, whereby three (3) wards namely Masumuni, Mbinga ‘A’, and Mbinga ‘B’ were selected among eighteen (18) wards. These wards were selected based on the high concentration of the Machinga in town areas. The congestion of people in a confined area may be a result of the presence of two big coffee factories and a high social interaction among ethnic groups such as Matengo people who own coffee plots. It was easy to observe the linguistic forms and communicative strategies used among the sellers and buyers during conversations in daily small business practices.

**Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative approach and case study design in order to understand the extent petty traders use linguistic forms and communicative strategies to facilitate business communication with customers. A case study allows for exploration and understanding of people’s language behaviour and practices in a specific context. Likewise, this study required an in-depth investigation of linguistic systems and communicative approaches utilised in Machinga conversations during their interactions on business. The case study is suggested by Eady and Moreau (2015) as a useful tool in studying community-based problems. The chosen design contributes to understanding the way petty traders construct meaning through using appropriate linguistic strategies when engaged in business activities.

**Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to observe and record twenty (20) conversations between petty traders and their customers at the market places. This procedure was advantageous because it requires fewer resources and is less time-consuming (Palys, 2008). Purposive sampling was deployed to select research participants based on their presence in a population of interest, characteristics, and experiences in the small business industry. Due to the nature of the phenomena, only twenty (20) conversations were enough for data analysis.

**Method of Data Collection**

The data were collected using observation and audio recording. According to Ward, House and Hamer (2009), the use of two methods aims to ensure consistency in data gathering and contribute to the trustworthiness of the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed thematically to identify recurring themes and patterns. The analysis process involved reviewing the collected data to identify the linguistic forms and communicative strategies used by petty traders and customers. The identified linguistic forms and communicative strategies were then defined and named; followed by presentation and interpretation of findings as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

**Findings and Discussion**

This part presents the findings of the study and discussion in relation to the reviewed literature. The data revealed the presence of many linguistic forms and communicative strategies such as loan words, code mixing, accent, parallelism, poor sentence structure, phrases, and registers which are used to facilitate business communication among petty traders and their customers.

**Grammatical Structure**

The study observed that there was usage of the same grammatical structure in the conversations between petty traders and their customers. For example, (Oi-ukali vipi…Oi-kamata) in English translation hello, what do you find…hello take. The opening words -oi-/hello aimed to draw attention to buyers, it is used by male Machinga when addressing customers. Also, the word (oi) expresses a close relationship of the speech community at the market. These findings correspond to Agustina et al. (2024) who argue that community language mastering can smooth business interactions.

**Use of Phrases such as Noun Phrase (NP)**

It was found that Machinga do not form sentences while making conversations with customers. They prefer to use phrases when advertising their goods. For example, in turn 28, *wahi maji, biskuti, soda, tochi, leso, lotion, wahi wateja! ...ya baridi haya,* (*get biscuts, soda, torch, lesso, lotion, get customers!)* are NP which lack subject-verb-object (SVO). It was found that they are limited with time and business context since they move around looking for customers, they do not want to waste time by speaking very long sentences. Barat and Talukder (2023) and Mostafiz and Alam (2022) claimed that the syntax of the language enables someone to communicate effectively with other people in business interaction. But the current study takes the syntax in the context of Machinga, in rare cases, they follow sentence rules.

**Prosodic Features**

Accent and tone are essential linguistic forms used by petty traders (Machinga) in their interactions with customers. For instance, in turns 97 and 21, Machinga employed Matengo words such as Bambo (friend) and Ngakuesekana (impossible), which were pronounced with the unique accent of the Chimatengo ethnic language. Additionally, Machinga often respond in a low tone, which serves as a polite way to convey reassurance, as seen in expressions like mkanda lipa elfu 6 (a belt, pay 6 thousand). The use of accent and tone not only reflects the traders' ethnic identity but also plays a strategic role in facilitating positive business interactions. The study by Nasab and Mehrazeen (2022) supports this observation, highlighting that tone can significantly influence the business relationship between sellers and buyers. Tone functions as a fundamental tool in communicating trust, politeness, and assurance, which are crucial for successful transactions.

**Loanwords**

In business interactions, loanwords play a crucial role in facilitating communication, especially in markets where new products or services are introduced to buyers. Many loanwords from both the ethnic languages and the English language have been incorporated into daily business exchanges. Examples include words such as tochi (torch), redio (radio), lotion, biskuti (biscuits), and soda (soda) from English, as well as ngakuesekana (impossible) and bambo (friend) from Matengo. These loanwords help to fill lexical gaps, enabling smoother communication between sellers and buyers. Beletskaya (2018) and Nagórka (2024) argued that borrowing involves incorporating words that were formerly not available in a language and making them an integral part of it. For instance, Spanish has borrowed many words from English, including nouns, adjectives and verbs. Similarly, this study observed that petty traders in Mbinga borrow words from both the Matengo language and English, such as bambo (friend), ngakuesekana (impossible), and product-related terms like losheni (lotion), tochi (torch), leso (cloth), and biskuti (biscuits). In business interactions, the borrowed words from different languages enrich the communication as they smoothen the exchange of goods and services.

**Language Mixing and Word Choices**

Mixing languages is another strategic approach employed by petty traders in Mbinga District, often used for prestige or to fulfill specific communicative needs. For example, the word kubeti (from the English stem "bet") has gained popularity in Tanzania, where it refers to the lottery. Currently, this word has been adopted and adapted into Swahili, demonstrating how language mixing can evolve and become an integral part of local vocabulary. Sulistyo *et al*. (2023) argue that code-mixing is determined by factors such as gender, age, and ethnicity, which shape the way traders use mixed languages in business interactions. Word choices also play a key role in branding and marketing products. Petty traders often use specific terms like msimbazi (ten thousand), masai (a term that can refer to a "barbaric person"), buku (one thousand), and faru (five thousand), as part of their communicative strategies. These words serve not only as functional terms but also as elements of the traders' branding and marketing efforts, enhancing the appeal of their products. In their study, Sombuntham and Wang (2021) highlighted the significance of lexicon knowledge in business, claiming that a strong lexicon can function as both a business brand and an identity. Therefore, petty traders create their own peculiar lexicon, reflecting communicative strategies that distinguish their language practices from others, contributing to their unique identity in the marketplace.

**Contribution of the Study**

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the linguistic forms and communicative strategies utilised by petty traders in business interactions. The study provides a methodological guide for applying Speech Act Theory to analyse the language forms and strategies employed by petty traders to facilitate communication in their business activities. Also, this study enriches the body of existing discourse analysis studies by shedding light on the specific language practices of petty traders, thereby expanding knowledge in the field of business communication and offering valuable understandings into the dynamic and evolving language practices within informal markets.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study concludes that petty traders (Maching) in Mbinga District utilise a range of linguistic forms, such as phrases, syntax, parallelism, grammar, and lexicon, alongside various communicative strategies like code mixing and switching, borrowing, word choices, accent, and tone. These language practices are important in the business contexts and should be nurtured and acknowledged, as language plays a crucial role in promoting socioeconomic development within the speech community. The forms and strategies used by petty traders to facilitate communication are significant for their business success and should align with the business contexts, as small enterprises are recognised as crucial drivers of economic growth in Tanzania. Therefore, it is important for petty traders to refine their language practices, as doing so will have a positive impact on their business growth and contribute to broader language development within the community.

**Limitations of the Study**

Purposive sampling was utilised in this qualitative methodology, with observation and audio recording being the primary methods of data collection. Data was gathered from twenty (20) conversations between petty traders and customers during business interactions at the markets. This sampling approach, however, limits the study as it analysed a relatively small number of conversations, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. To address this limitation, further research should consider adopting a multiple data collection approach, such as a mixed-methods approach, in order to explore the issue from a variety of perspectives and enhance the strength and applicability of the findings.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

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