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Linguistic Rights as Human Rights: Promoting Dignified Language in Spousal Communication within the Shona Society

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Abstract

This study examines the often-overlooked dimension of linguistic human rights within marital communication in Shona society, shifting attention from traditional concerns of language preservation to the right to dignified and respectful language use between spouses. Anchored in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Peace Linguistics, and the African ethical philosophy of Ubuntu, the research conceptualises spousal linguistic violence as a form of symbolic harm enacted through verbal and paralinguistic choices that demean, silence, or emotionally wound partners. As a culturally grounded framework, Ubuntu emphasises empathy, relational harmony, and the intrinsic worth of every individual, underscoring the ethical imperative of dignified communication in intimate relationships. Drawing on qualitative data from focus group discussions, interviews, and naturalistic audio recordings, the analysis identifies recurring patterns such as stupidising, nothingising, and impurifying speech that perpetuate patriarchal power asymmetries and relational harm. The findings reveal that linguistic violence often operates as a reciprocal and context-dependent practice that undermines emotional well-being and marital harmony. It concludes that the right to dignified language constitutes a

core human right and recommends integrating peace-linguistic and Ubuntu-informed principles into marital counselling, domestic violence prevention, and community education programmes. The study advances the conceptualisation of linguistic human rights by including everyday spousal interactions, thereby offering an ethically and culturally informed lens for analysing and reforming harmful communication patterns within Shona society and analogous contexts.

Keywords: *African philosophy; dignity; human rights; linguistic human rights; linguistic violence; marital communication; peace linguistics; relational ethics; spousal communication; symbolic violence; Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL); Ubuntu.*

1. Introduction

Linguistic rights are widely recognised as fundamental human rights that guarantee individuals and communities the ability to use, maintain, and develop their languages without discrimination or suppression (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995; May, 2012). Zimbabwe's discourse on linguistic human rights, at both the scholarly and policy levels, has largely been restricted to issues concerning the preservation and promotion of minority languages such as Tonga, Kalanga, Nambya, and Zimbabwean Sign Language (Chimhundu, 1992; Nyika, 2008; Mheta & Nyamende, 2021). This emphasis has been vital for affirming cultural identity and resisting linguistic marginalisation. However, such an approach tends to privilege collective linguistic rights while overlooking the interpersonal dimension of linguistic justice, specifically the right to be addressed with dignity and respect within domestic and intimate relationships.

While linguistic human rights scholarship in Zimbabwe has predominantly focused on the preservation and promotion of minority languages as markers of cultural identity and political inclusion (Mheta & Nyamende, 2021; Piller, 2020), the interpersonal dimension of linguistic dignity remains largely overlooked. Addressing this gap requires reconceptualising linguistic human rights to include the right to dignity-affirming communication within personal relationships. It also calls for analytical frameworks capable of identifying, interpreting, and mitigating symbolic linguistic violence in marital contexts.

This study shifts attention from language as a marker of group identity to language as a vehicle of relational ethics within marital communication in Shona society. It argues that linguistic human rights extend beyond language maintenance to encompass the right to humane,

non-degrading, and dignity-affirming language use. Language, in this perspective, functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a moral instrument that can either sustain or erode emotional safety and mutual recognition. Even within one's mother tongue, linguistic choices can enact symbolic violence through verbal aggression, silencing, ridicule, or other forms of communicative domination (Pillai et al., 2025). This therefore implies the need to safeguard a people's linguistic rights even within their mother tongue.

Spousal linguistic violence is defined as a pattern of communicative acts (involving verbal expression, tone, or silence) employed to demean and devalue a partner's self-worth. These acts often operate within cultural norms that normalise sarcasm, verbal control, or humiliation as acceptable marital behaviour. In patriarchal Shona society, speech acts that undermine dignity, whether directed at women or men, may be socially excused as expressions of authority, discipline, or correction (Makoni & Meinhof, 2004; Moyo, 2015; Kambarami, 2006). Such normalisation conceals the emotional injuries embedded in language, making verbal abuse an invisible yet persistent form of violence. Consequently, marital domains become spaces where linguistic rights are routinely violated through everyday discourse.

Ubuntu, a foundational African moral philosophy, emphasises communal harmony, mutual respect, and the intrinsic worth of every person (Mbiti, 1969; Letseka, 2012; Ramose, 2002). Linguistically, Ubuntu calls for speech that fosters empathy, peace, and relational balance. Although it has not historically been explicitly conceptualised in terms of linguistic rights, its principles inherently promote language that affirms human dignity. Ubuntu emphasises moral and social responsibility in communication, encouraging speech that fosters empathy, inclusion, and relational well-being (Ngondo & Klyueva 2022). By linking Ubuntu to ethical language use, this study situates spousal communication within a culturally grounded framework, highlighting the moral imperative of dignity-affirming discourse. Yet, in practice, marital communication often departs from these ideals. Verbal aggression, silence, and sarcastic tones contradict Ubuntu's moral grammar, inflicting emotional wounds and fracturing relational harmony (Machingura, 2017; Hlongwane, 2019). This gap underscores the need to extend linguistic rights discourse to the ethical use of language in private relationships.

The study is theoretically grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Peace Linguistics (PL). SFL provides an analytical framework for examining how meaning is enacted through linguistic choices at

multiple strata: phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic within context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Peace Linguistics complements this with a moral-philosophical lens that emphasises language use for empathy, conflict prevention, and restoration of human dignity (López, 2016). Integrating these approaches allows for a comprehensive exploration of both structural and ethical dimensions of spousal discourse. While SFL explains how linguistic violence is realised, peace linguistics elucidates why such language use matters for human and relational well-being.

By foregrounding relational ethics, this study expands the understanding of linguistic human rights beyond collective language preservation to encompass the individual right to be addressed with dignity. It thus reconceptualises linguistic rights as both a social and interpersonal imperative, safeguarding not only cultural identity but also emotional well-being and relational harmony. Within the Zimbabwean context, such an approach offers a transformative pathway for promoting peaceable communication and restoring Ubuntu's moral essence in everyday language use.

Therefore, the study first seeks to critically examine how linguistic rights have been conceptualised in Zimbabwean scholarship, with particular attention to the existing gap concerning interpersonal linguistic dignity within marital relationships. Second, it aims to explore the various manifestations and relational effects of spousal linguistic violence as they emerge in Shona marital communication, thereby revealing how language can both sustain and erode dignity in intimate interactions. Finally, the study applies the principles of Peace Linguistics as a framework for promoting ethical and restorative linguistic practices in marital communication, proposing practical intervention strategies that foster dignity, respect, and peace in spousal relationships.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to reimagining linguistic human rights as not only collective or institutional concerns but also as essential safeguards of interpersonal dignity and peace within domestic life.

2. Literature review

2.1 Rethinking Linguistic Rights: Beyond Minority Language Recognition

Linguistic rights have historically emphasised the protection, maintenance, and development of minority languages, recognising their role in cultural identity, political inclusion, and resistance to linguistic imperialism (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995; May, 2012; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). In Zimbabwe, studies by Chimhundu (1992), Nyika (2008), and Mheta and Nyamende (2021) have highlighted the marginalisation of languages such as Tonga, Nambya, Kalanga, Venda, Chewa, and Zimbabwean Sign Language, advocating for inclusive education, media representation, and official recognition. This macro-level approach remains indispensable in affirming collective identity and rectifying historical inequities.

However, this framework largely overlooks the interpersonal dimension of linguistic rights, particularly how language may harm or affirm dignity within private relational contexts. The ability to speak one's mother tongue does not inherently guarantee respectful communication. As Bourdieu (1991) theorises, symbolic violence can be enacted subtly through language, silences, and culturally sanctioned forms of expression that may seem benign but reproduce power asymmetries. In intimate contexts, including marriage, verbal aggression, derogatory metaphors, and strategic silences can erode relational dignity and emotional well-being, even when expressed in a mother tongue.

The omission of micro-level interpersonal harms constitutes a theoretical gap: while collective rights frameworks safeguard access and representation, they fail to account for the ethical and affective dimensions of everyday language use. Scholars such as Piller (2016) have emphasised the need to expand linguistic justice to encompass relational and ethical considerations, including the right to be addressed with dignity. In African marital contexts, where language is deeply entwined with power, respect, and gender norms, the failure to recognize interpersonal linguistic harm leaves a significant blind spot in both scholarship and practice.

2.2 Spousal Linguistic Violence in African Marital Communication

Research on domestic violence in African contexts has historically foregrounded physical, sexual, and economic abuse, with linguistic and symbolic harm often relegated to the periphery (Ncube, 2017; Akintan, 2013). However, recent studies have begun to highlight the importance of verbal and symbolic forms of abuse, showing that language itself can function as a tool of control and relational harm. For instance, Bankale (2018) demonstrates how verbal expressions within Yoruba households constitute culturally sanctioned tools of violence that degrade, intimidate, or silence partners. Similarly, Davis (2024) establishes a link between gendered language use and the incidence of intimate partner violence, suggesting that speech patterns can reinforce patriarchal dominance. Furthermore, Hourani (2021) argues that structural and symbolic violence intensifies the effects of gender-based abuse, underscoring the critical need to incorporate non-physical harms into comprehensive intervention strategies. Collectively, these studies underscore that linguistic violence is not a peripheral concern, but a critical dimension of intimate partner harm, necessitating focused scholarly and practical attention.

Such violence manifests across multiple communicative levels. For instance, verbal insults, sarcastic tones, silences, and culturally coded metaphors can function to control, humiliate, or manipulate, even within culturally normative frameworks. Terms of address, corrective idioms, and indirect expressions, though linguistically conventional, may operate as instruments of symbolic harm. Gendered asymmetries are pronounced: women are often expected to communicate deferentially, while men may exercise verbal authority with minimal social sanction. However, reciprocal forms of linguistic retaliation also occur, reflecting the relational complexity of marital discourse.

Analyses of spousal discourse underscore that harm extends beyond overt aggression; subtler mechanisms, such as conversational exclusion, evaluative epithets, and prosodic manipulation, are equally potent in undermining self-worth and relational equality. Across African societies, silence, euphemism, idiomatic avoidance, and ritualised compliance may reinforce asymmetrical power while appearing culturally appropriate. This recognition of the pervasive and relational nature of verbal abuse provides a compelling rationale for reconceptualising linguistic human rights to encompass dignity-affirming communication, where language is

not only a medium of expression but also a moral and ethical instrument safeguarding emotional well-being and relational integrity.

2.3 Symbolic Violence and Cultural Context

Symbolic violence, a concept first articulated by Bourdieu (1991), refers to the subtle and often invisible ways in which social hierarchies and power imbalances are reproduced through language, behaviour, and cultural norms. Unlike physical violence, symbolic violence operates through meaning-making, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and self-worth. In intimate and domestic settings, such as marital communication, linguistic forms of symbolic violence like mockery, belittlement, silencing, and derogatory labelling can profoundly undermine an individual's sense of dignity and emotional security (Bardall, 2020; Jacobson, 2009). These forms of harm are frequently normalised within cultural or patriarchal norms, rendering them difficult to recognise and challenging to address, yet their effects are both real and cumulative, affecting relational harmony, psychological well-being, and social identity. This recognition directly motivates the present investigation, which seeks to document and analyse the ways spousal linguistic practices in Shona society enact symbolic violence so that these often-invisible harms can be made visible and addressed within a culturally grounded framework.

The ethical implications of symbolic violence point to a pressing need to reconceptualise linguistic human rights beyond collective or institutional concerns. Language is not merely a medium of communication; it is a moral and social instrument capable of affirming or eroding dignity (Zschomler, 2019; May, 2021). Recognising the right to be addressed with dignity in intimate spaces elevates interpersonal linguistic practices to the level of a human rights concern, emphasising the protection of individuals from verbal and paralinguistic harm. In this context, spousal linguistic violence constitutes a violation of human dignity, demanding frameworks that integrate both analytical and ethical dimensions. Consequently, this study investigates spousal linguistic violence with the aim of both describing its specific manifestations and developing a framework for dignity-affirming communication. The research aims to show how routine marital interactions can be ethically guided to uphold fundamental human rights, drawing on culturally relevant principles such as Ubuntu.

2.4 Toward Ethical and Restorative Communication: Peace Linguistics

Peace Linguistics (Lopez, 2002, 2016) offers an ethical framework for fostering relationally safe and dignity-affirming language practices. Unlike descriptive linguistics, peace linguistics foregrounds the moral implications of linguistic choices, promoting empathy, respect, and restoration in contexts of conflict and relational harm. In marital communication, applying these principles encourages interventions that mitigate symbolic violence and cultivate equitable, restorative dialogue. Operationally, ethical communication strategies can be organised around recognition of the partner's dignity, reframing negative or harmful speech, regulating emotional intensity, developing peaceful interactional habits, and engaging in reparative discourse. While these concepts draw inspiration from peace linguistics literature and relational ethics, they are applied here as analytic and interventionist tools emerging from the present study rather than referencing unpublished models.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), peace linguistics, and Ubuntu philosophy to explore how language constructs, sustains, or restores dignity within Shona marital communication. The framework combines structural, ethical, and cultural lenses to reveal how linguistic choices are both reflections of power relations and instruments of relational healing. Firstly, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1978, 1994) and later refined by Matthiessen (2014), provides the structural foundation for analysing how meaning is made through language in context. SFL posits that language performs three metafunctions; ideational, interpersonal, and textual, which interact to convey experience, negotiate relationships, and structure discourse. Within marital exchanges, the ideational metafunction reveals how spouses construe events of blame, affection, or misunderstanding; the interpersonal metafunction uncovers how tone, address terms, and pronoun use encode attitudes, power, and emotional alignment; while the textual metafunction highlights how discourse coherence or fragmentation shapes mutual understanding. Through this perspective, the study identifies the specific linguistic choices that either uphold or

erode relational dignity, illustrating how everyday utterances become vehicles of symbolic violence or respect.

Secondly, while SFL explains how language functions, Peace Linguistics (López, 2021) provides the moral compass that guides why language should be used to nurture peace and dignity. Peace Linguistics emphasises that communication is not a neutral act but an ethical choice that can either inflict harm or foster harmony. It foregrounds the principle that words possess restorative power. They can heal emotional wounds, reduce hostility, and rebuild trust. From this standpoint, spousal linguistic violence represents a breakdown of linguistic peace, where language ceases to affirm the humanity of both speaker and listener. Therefore, peace linguistics extends SFL's analytical depth by proposing a restorative communicative orientation, one that encourages conscious linguistic behaviour aimed at reconciliation, empathy, and mutual respect within intimate relationships.

Moreover, the ethical dimension of peace linguistics is culturally anchored through Ubuntu philosophy, which provides an indigenous moral lens for interpreting interpersonal communication. Ubuntu, expressed in the aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other people"), conceives of dignity as inherently relational (Ramose, 2002; Nussbaum, 2003). In Shona society, this philosophy resonates with values such as *rukudzo* (respect), *bunbu* (moral character), and *ukama* (kinship), which emphasise that one's humanity is affirmed through respectful interaction with others. Ubuntu thus extends the notion of linguistic rights beyond individual entitlement to communal responsibility, situating communication within a network of moral accountability. In this regard, ethical language use becomes a shared cultural duty a way of sustaining peace through the preservation of human dignity.

Collectively, these three frameworks offer a unified perspective, synthesising the analysis of linguistic structure, ethical intent, and culturally embedded moral standards. SFL provides the analytical precision to examine the structural realisations of linguistic violence; peace linguistics offers the ethical orientation for transforming those patterns into peace-promoting expressions; and Ubuntu philosophy grounds these transformations in the moral fabric of African relationality. Therefore, the integrative framework advances a dual focus on *diagnosis* and *restoration*, diagnosing how linguistic choices perpetuate harm while offering dignity-affirming alternatives that encourage mutual respect and relational healing. Ultimately, this synthesis aid in redefining linguistic

rights as human rights enacted through everyday communication, emphasising that to speak ethically is to affirm the humanity of the other. In so doing, it positions language as both the source and the solution to interpersonal conflict, reaffirming its central role in sustaining peace and dignity within intimate spaces.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design to explore the complex linguistic and relational dynamics of spousal communication within Shona society. The qualitative approach is appropriate for capturing nuanced, contextually embedded meanings of language use, particularly in settings where power, culture, and emotion intersect within marital interactions. The analysis is theoretically grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), which conceptualizes language as a system of interrelated choices across strata including lexicogrammar, semantics, pragmatics, phonology, and paralinguistics. SFL provides a framework for examining how these linguistic choices enact interpersonal relations, social roles, and power dynamics in marital discourse. Complementing SFL, the study draws on peace linguistics (Lopez, 2002, 2016) to provide an ethical lens, emphasising language as a tool for fostering empathy, relational harmony, and restorative communication. Together, these frameworks enable the study to investigate both the structural features of language and their ethical implications within marital interactions.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth, triangulation, and cultural relevance. Four focus group discussions were conducted, two with married couples and two with marriage counsellors, to capture shared norms, perceptions, and experiences regarding spousal language use. The study utilised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twelve participants—all of whom self-identified as experiencing or engaging in verbal marital conflict—to collect rich personal narratives detailing their communicative dynamics. Additionally, private conversations from six volunteer couples were audio-recorded, with informed consent, to capture authentic speech and paralinguistic cues such as tone, pitch, pauses, laughter, and silences. Participants were purposively selected from urban and peri-urban communities in Zimbabwe to reflect diverse socio-economic backgrounds and marital experiences. Inclusion criteria included married

individuals aged 25–55, willingness to participate in FGDs or recordings, and marriage counsellors with at least five years' professional experience.

Data analysis followed a stratified, thematic approach aligned with SFL and peace linguistics. Audio recordings and transcripts were transcribed verbatim and coded iteratively across SFL strata: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Harmful linguistic patterns, including ridicule, silencing, and sarcasm, were identified inductively from the data rather than being imposed from pre-existing frameworks. Paralinguistic features were analyzed through repeated listening, detailed field notes, and verification with participant reflections to ensure accuracy. The relational effects of linguistic acts, such as emotional impact, power shifts, and identity positioning, were also examined. This approach ensured that coding categories emerged organically from empirical evidence, maintaining analytical transparency and rigour.

Given the sensitive nature of domestic and relational conflicts, ethical protocols were rigorously observed. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, anonymity was preserved using pseudonyms and secure data storage, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. While the qualitative, context-specific design limits generalizability, it offers rich, culturally situated insights into spousal linguistic dynamics. Potential biases, such as social desirability or language barriers, were mitigated through careful participant selection, rapport building, and methodological triangulation.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the study on spousal linguistic violence in Shona marital communication, analysed through a stratified lens informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study's analysis of language at various strata (lexicogrammar, semantics, pragmatics, and paralinguistics) allows for a nuanced capture of the surface manifestations and the critical relational dynamics inherent in harmful speech. These stratified manifestations reveal the systematic process through which linguistic choices, even when performed in the mother tongue, can erode dignity, disrupt relational balance, and ultimately violate fundamental human rights. The discussion integrates Peace Linguistics (PL) and the ethical principles of Ubuntu, highlighting strategies for restorative, dignity-affirming communication.

5.1. Ideational and Lexicogrammatical Manifestations: Stupidizing and Nothingizing

At the ideational level, language functions to represent and construct realities. Analysis revealed frequent instances of stupidising speech, where one spouse—most often the wife—is constructed as intellectually inferior through utterances such as “*Hausi munhu anofunga*” (“You don’t think like a person”) and sarcastic interrogatives. These expressions undermine agency and cognitive competence, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies. Similarly, nothingising behaviours, such as extended silences, dismissive interruptions, or conversational exclusion, render the spouse invisible within the marital dialogue. These ideational and lexicogrammatical patterns demonstrate that the mere ability to speak one’s language does not guarantee being spoken to with dignity—a core dimension of linguistic human rights.

5.2. Interpersonal and Pragmatic Manifestations: Impurifying and Gendered Speech

At the interpersonal and pragmatic level, linguistic choices regulate social relations and exercise power. Instances of impurifying language were observed, where spouses were assigned moral or sexual deficiencies through culturally coded insults. Gendered speech, including feminising or masculinising terms, functioned to invert or ridicule expected gender roles, thereby undermining self-worth. These pragmatic choices convey symbolic violence that damages not only the spouse’s dignity but also social standing within community networks. Ubuntu’s principle of relational respect underscores the ethical imperative to address these harms, as such language violates communal norms of humaneness and care for the other.

5.3. Textual and Cohesive Patterns: Conversational Silencing and Retaliation

Textual analysis revealed discursive patterns that structure interactions to the detriment of relational equality. Silencing techniques, such as strategic non-responses and dismissive topic shifts, disrupt conversational cohesion and reinforce power asymmetries. Notably, the findings indicate mutual participation in linguistic harm, where wives occasionally employ retaliatory or resistive speech within culturally sanctioned idioms.

This dynamic highlights the complexity of relational language, challenging one-dimensional victim-perpetrator models and reinforcing the need for nuanced intervention strategies rooted in empathy and mutual recognition.

5.4. Paralinguistic Manifestations: Tone, Prosody, and Emotional Harm

Paralinguistic features, including raised pitch, sarcastic laughter, and exaggerated prosody, amplify the relational impact of harmful speech. These non-verbal cues often convey contempt, derision, or exclusion more powerfully than lexical content alone. SFL's paralinguistic stratum helps to reveal how emotional harm is encoded in vocal delivery, while PL offers tools for regulating tone and fostering respectful interaction. For instance, interventions informed by PL and Ubuntu advocate for voice modulation, empathetic listening, and inclusive language as mechanisms for restoring dignity and relational harmony.

5.5. Integrating Ubuntu and Peace Linguistics: Towards Restorative Practices

The stratified analysis demonstrates that linguistic violence operates across multiple levels of language, affecting cognition, social positioning, and emotional well-being. Drawing on peace linguistics and Ubuntu, restorative strategies can be implemented to counteract these harms. These include using respectful terms of address, reframing conflict narratives through empathy, regulating tone and prosody, establishing inclusive conversational practices, and engaging in reparative speech acts such as apologies and expressions of forgiveness. Collectively, these approaches operationalise the fundamental human right to dignified communication, effectively bridging ethical theory with culturally grounded intervention strategies for intimate marital contexts.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study critically examined the intersection of linguistic rights and domestic relational dynamics within Shona marital communication, highlighting spousal linguistic violence as a pervasive yet under-recognised form of symbolic harm. By moving beyond conventional linguistic rights frameworks that focus on minority language

preservation, the study emphasizes the importance of relational dignity: the right to be addressed with respect, ethical consideration, and care within intimate relationships. Language, it shows, is not neutral; even when spoken in one's mother tongue, it can serve as a vehicle for humiliation, control, or emotional injury, particularly in culturally and patriarchally structured marital contexts.

Through a stratified analysis utilising SFL, the study establishes that spousal linguistic violence functions and manifests across various interdependent strata of language. Lexicogrammatical and semantic choices, such as stupidising or nothingising utterances, undermine agency and self-concept. Pragmatic strategies and paralinguistic cues, including sarcastic tone, mocking laughter, and strategic silence, reinforce relational harm, creating emotional distance, disrupting mutual understanding, and reinforcing power asymmetries (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The findings also reveal that both partners may participate in reciprocal forms of verbal harm, illustrating that spousal linguistic violence is a dynamic, dialogic phenomenon rather than a one-sided exercise of power.

By integrating ethical insights from peace linguistics and Ubuntu philosophy, the study situates these findings within a restorative framework that emphasises empathy, mutual recognition, and relational repair. Peace Linguistics provides guidance for cultivating dignity-affirming speech and conflict-sensitive communication (Innocentia, 2020). Complementarily, the philosophy of Ubuntu foregrounds relational interconnectedness, highlighting the moral imperative to speak to others in ways that sustain trust, care, and communal harmony (Mugumbate & Mtetwa, 2024). Together, these frameworks suggest that safeguarding linguistic rights requires attention not only to language access but also to the ethical quality of language in intimate contexts. Symbolic violence provides a theoretical lens for understanding the subtle, often normalized mechanisms through which language enacts harm (Bourdieu, 1991).

Based on these insights, it is recommended that scholars, policymakers, and practitioners develop integrative strategies that promote dignified, peaceful, and ethical language use in intimate relationships. Such strategies could include legal recognition of verbal and symbolic abuse in domestic violence frameworks, culturally grounded public awareness and educational campaigns emphasising respectful communication, and counselling approaches that draw on peace linguistics and Ubuntu to restore relational balance, regulate emotional intensity, and facilitate constructive dialogue. By centering

relational dignity and ethical speech, this integrative approach addresses the micro-level harms of spousal linguistic violence while reinforcing the broader human right to be spoken to with respect and care. Future research should on validating and expanding these approaches across diverse cultural contexts, thereby ensuring that subsequent interventions are empirically grounded and contextually relevant.

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