Examination of Spatial Deictic Markers in Kingoni

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine spatial deixis in Kingoni within the framework of the cognitive semantics approach. A total of 60 adults and grandparents that were purposively selected from 30 households in Songea Rural District were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. Data on Kingoni spatial orientation was analysed using thematic and quotation analysis techniques, with special interest in underlying coordinates, body-sidedness, and the absolute and intrinsic frame of reference. The study results show that Kingoni has five deictic terms with movement or motion components categorised into two groups: go (*hambai, wukai*) and come (*bwelai, wuyai,* and *kiliwukai*). It has also been realised that Kingoni is a hybrid system of frames of reference, changing from one frame to another when interacting. It uses object-sidedness (intrinsic frame of reference) and body-sidedness to express or point to something like *kumangiga* (the right hand) or *kumandyoli* (the left-hand side). Kingoni exhibits four spatial dimension differences when expressing the location of an object from a given viewpoint. These are *apa* (near), *pala* (near far), *palanaha* (far), and *palé* (far most). Accordingly, the study recommends continued research in natural language to enrich existing knowledge about deictic markers.

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1.0 Introduction

Deixis disquiets how languages convert or grammaticalize features of the context of expression or speech event (Talmy, 2000; Levinson, 1983). It is also concerned with how understanding expressions is dependent on analysing the utterance's context. The addressee analyses the context of the expression to encode meaning or grammaticalize the utterance. The context of the expression can be analysed from a personal, temporal, spatial, social, or discursive point of view. According to Kazazi (2013), Saeed (2009), Levinson (2006), Levinson (1983), and Lyons (1977), personal deixis concentrates on accurately identifying the grammatical persons, such as the speaker, listener, and object under discussion. Temporal deixis reveals the time of speaking or expression production, such as now, then, next week, and last month. The specification of locations relative to the anchorage point in the speech event is known as spatial deixis. Social deixis reveals the social distinctions related to participant roles, specifically focusing on the social relationships between the speaker and the addressee(s) or between the speaker and certain referents within the discourse. Deixis describes the use of expressions in a sentence to refer to a portion of the discourse that contains a given utterance.

Linguists, psychologists, and philosophers have long considered the importance of space/location and spatial experience for language and thought, and they discovered that speakers can clarify relationships between objects, people, or places (Andrea, Lenz, and Evans, 2003). When establishing reference points, they observed spatial particles (the subset of deixis). It also allows speakers to refer to specific locations in the environment. Moreover, deixis enables the semantic accuracy of utterances or sentences. Again, it allows for referential accuracy, allowing the speaker to refer to an entity without naming it. According to Levinson (1983), the value of deictic markers is critical when such information is lacking in expressions or speech. Deictic markers imbue the utterance with meaning.

Numerous studies have explored the significance of spatial deixis and deixis in general, highlighting its usefulness in diverse languages. For instance, Okombo and Habwe (2017) assert that Kiswahili uses spatial deictics morphologically to convey information that only a specific context can explain. Moreover, Otero (2021) and Schokkin (2021) reinforce the value of motion deictic in assigning meaning. This study revealed that deictic terms have no specific direction. In some languages, the deictic centres are only the addresses of the members of the communication scenario. According to Levinson (2003), deictic description in language is of particular interest to cognitive science. Space, time, person, and status are central cognitive domains for both animal and human thinking. Also, the role of gestures, figures, diagrams, geometry, and maps in our thinking attests to the role of deictic markers in our review. Language treats each deictic centre as a semantic field using typology, frame of reference, and motion decryption.

Numerous scholars have conducted research on deixis, including Kazazi (2013), Yeibo (2012), Jungbluth (2011), Andrea et al. (2003), Levinson (2003), Talmy (2000), Levinson (1996), Landau (1993), and Talmy (1983). These studies have shown many more cross-linguistic variations in deictic markers and semantic orientation. Many languages use different deictic markers, frames of reference, typology, and motion to encode meaning. Although prior research has revealed many forms of deixis and their applications, little is known about spatial deixis in Kingoni and its semantic value. Knowledge of Kingoni spatial deixis is important since it enables the extraction of meaning from the Kingoni communicative scene as well as text. This knowledge is also useful to any Kingoni non-speaker paying a visit to Ngoni society as a guest or tourist. As a result, the current study aimed to investigate common deictic markers used by Ngoni native speakers in Songea rural district, as well as their semantic meaning.

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area

Figure 1

Map Showing Four Selected Villages in Songea Rural District
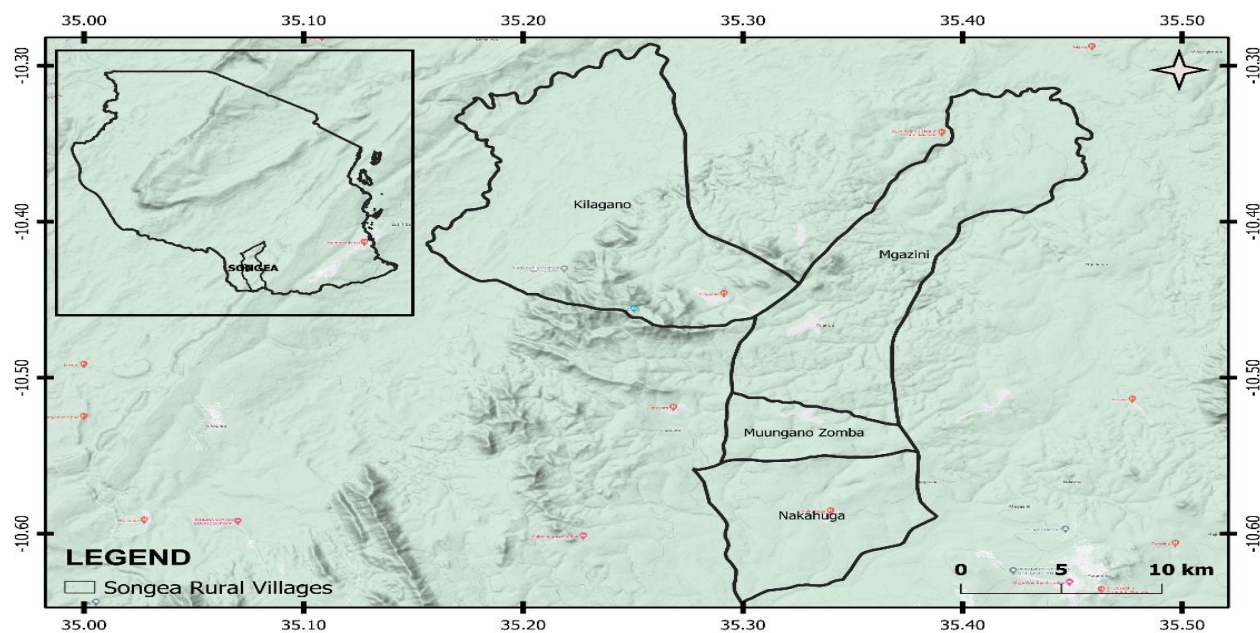
This study, as depicted in Figure 1, was conducted in four villages within Songea Rural District: Nakahuga, Muungano Zomba, Mgazini, and Kilagano (Figure 1). These villages were purposively selected because they were within Songea Rural District, which holds most of the Ngoni-speaking communities in Tanzania, and custodians of the information required in this study. Kingoni is a dominant language in the study area and the language of communication at the household and community level.

2.2 Research Design

A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed to gain a nuanced understanding of spatial deixis within Ngoni's local cultural contexts. Ethnography generates timely, actionable findings through intensive yet compressed fieldwork suitable for given research constraints (Dawson, 2002; Tate, 2020). It allows the researcher to gain deep insight and understanding about people's behaviour, beliefs, and practices.

2.3 Sampling

A household with a grandparent was the study unit. The household was regarded as a study unit because it is the dwelling place. The targeted Ngoni adults and elders live at a household level. Also, the communication process at the societal level begins at the family level. The household with an elder or grandparent was highly considered to participate in the study.

A total of 30 households in the selected villages were included in the study: 2, 4, 6, 1, 5, 7, 26, 29, 23, and 12 households were from Mgazini Village; 8, 10, 16, 18, 20, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17 households were from Nakahuga Village; 3, 19, 21, 24, and 30 households were from Kilagano. Lastly, from Muungano Zomba, there are 22, 24, 28, 25, and 27 households based on the village size and availability of elders in the households. The sample size was deemed adequate because, in qualitative research, a small sample size is required to ensure a deep investigation of each unit. Also, collecting and analysing data takes a considerable

time; hence, the addition of participants lengthens that time. Furthermore, a sample size should not be so large that it is difficult to undertake in-depth and meaningful analysis. According to Cresswell (2012), the sample size may range from 1 to 40 and above, depending on the need to report details (P. 2009).

In selecting the study sample, purposive or deliberate sampling was used to select adults and elders for interviewing in each household as the most informed persons about the Kingoni language. This method follows a preconceived plan that is relevant to the specific research. In the case of this study, only a small sample of native speakers of Kingoni and the villages were selected using this approach to be respondents to the study. It also guaranteed accurate representation of the targeted Ngoni-speaking population.

2.4   Data Collection Methods

This study used interviews as the method of data collection. The interview (elicitation mode) was used to collect data from key informants. The informants consisted of elders and adults. In every household, two respondents were chosen. One elder (grandparent) and one adult are the custodians of the Ngoni language at the household level. Interviews were sought to gather data on deictic markers in Kingoni and their role in meaning construction. The elicitation technique was employed to seek additional information and clarification from the responses provided by the elders.

2.5   Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically after their recording and transcription (Dawson, 2002). The transcriptions were translated into English, and a sketch was used to illustrate the concept of deixis and their frames of reference. Deixis cannot be conceptualised in a lexicon (Ibnus, 2018); rather, the interpretation is made through the association with other words in the sentence, and its understanding in this study is best with diagrams. In examining the significance and implication of deictic terms in Kingoni, the quotation analysis method was also used. Corden and Sainsbury (2006) emphasise that verbal quotations cement the findings as evidence, explanations, and illustrations to deepen understanding of participants' voices and improve readability.

3.0   Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the examination of Kingoni spatial deictic markers. The section begins with demographic information about the study's respondents, and then presents the results about Kingoni spatial deictic markers and their discussion, contributing to the existing body of knowledge in semantics and pragmatics.

3.1   Descriptive Statistics

A total of 60 Ngoni-speaking adults and elders were involved in this study. The distribution of the sample across the various villages, as well as the respondents' gender and age characteristics, are provided in the figures below.

3.2   Distribution of Respondents in Villages

Respondent selection ensured representation across villages and genders, eliciting diverse narratives about spatial deixis. As shown in Figure 2, 20 respondents were from Mgazini village, 20 were from Nakahuga village, 10 were from Kilagano village, and 10 were from Muungano Zomba village. The distribution is based on the village size and the number of citizens.
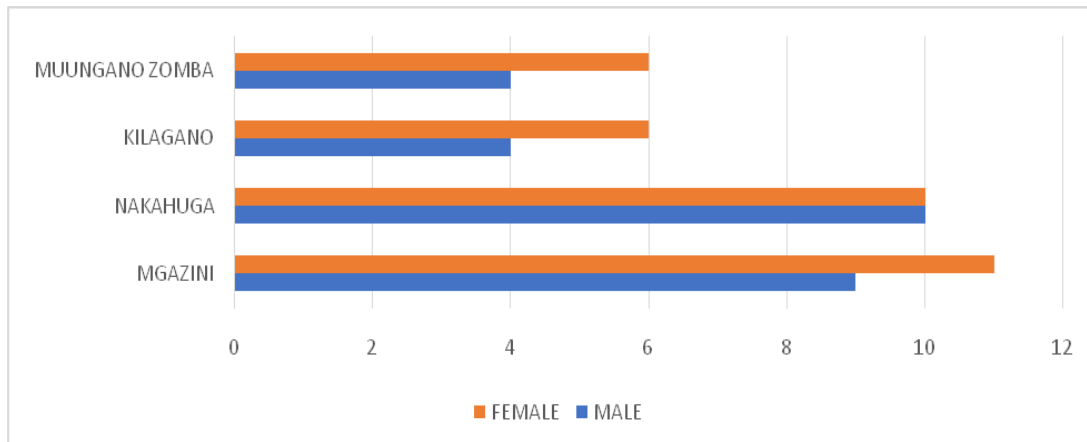
Figure 2
Distribution of Respondents
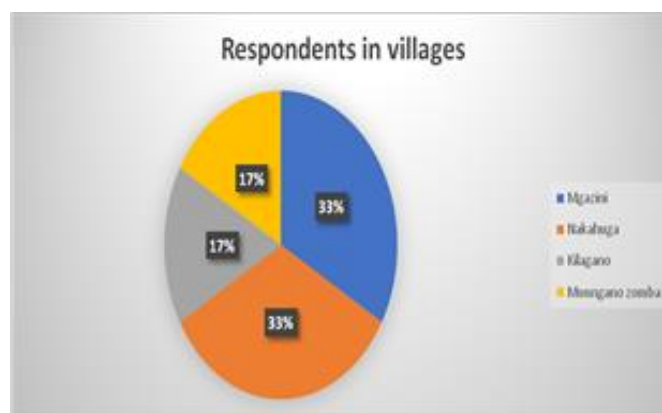
3.3   Gender Distribution of Respondents

As indicated in Figure 3, during the sample selection, the researcher included both male and female genders. 45% of the respondents were male from Mgazini (10%), Nakahauga (16.6%), Kilagano (6.6%), and Muunganozomba (6.6%), and 55% of the female respondents were from Mgazini (18.3%), Nakahuga (16.6%), Muunganozomba (10%), and Kilagano (10%).

Gender is a critical aspect of language study. Language competence tends to be transmitted from one generation to another. The female gender is much better at internalising language competence than the male gender because they engage in more skills like reading, speaking, and listening (Kheder, 2023).

Figure 3
*Gender Distribution of Respondents*

3.4 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age factors were considered in this study. Figure 4 shows that the age of selected respondents ranged from 35 to over 71 years. 56.6% of the respondents were aged 61–70 years, 16.6% ranged from 51–60 years, and 11.6% ranged from 41–50 years. Not only that, the study included 5% of respondents aged 31–40 years, and 6% of the respondents were over 71 years old.

Figure 4
Age of Respondents
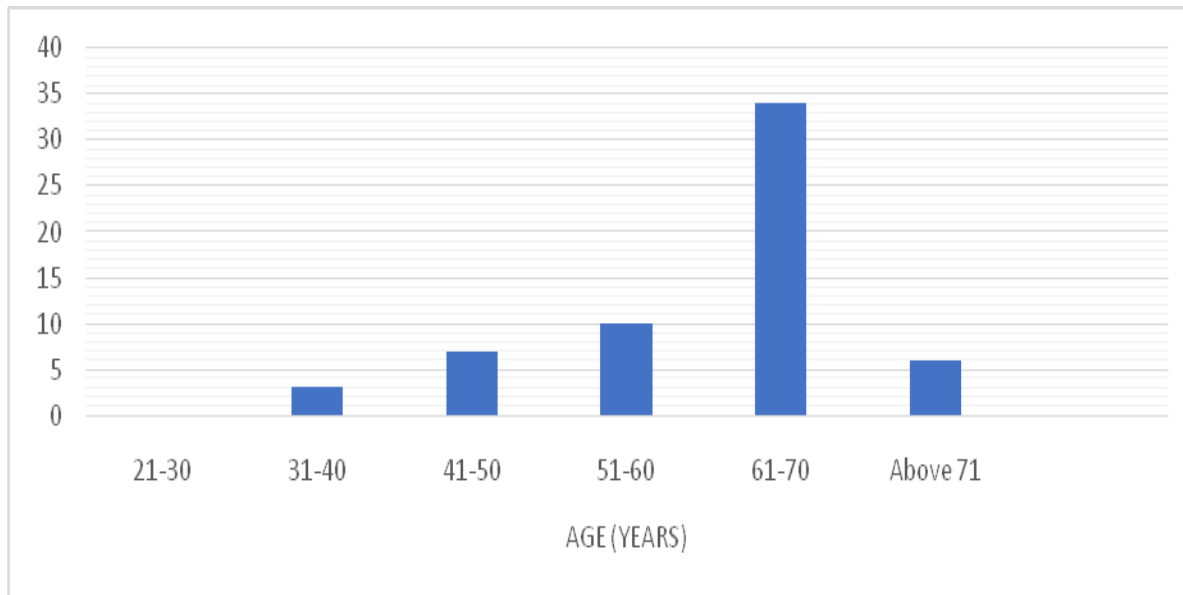
3.5   Examination of Kingoni Deictic Markers and their Meaning

3.5.1   Movement Deictic Markers

Table 1

Kingoni Motion Deictic Markers

Kingoni	English	Kingoni sentence	English Sentence
Yokola-	remove from the fire	*Yokolaimandondo ago*	Remove those beans from the kitchen
Pepai-	Go/go-ahead	*Nagama apepililukela*	Nagama left early in the morning
Nenula-	put down from the head	*Jeni ashindwilikunenulamanji*	Jane has failed to put down the bucket of water
Jumbai-s	run/chase	*Libwalijumba sana*	The dog runs very much
Gendai	Walk	*Tyambatigendai*	Let us walk
Kupuka	Cross over	*Longinus akupwikiMfuleni*	Longinus has crossed the river
Tila	Run	*Natilili*	I ran away
Gegai	Carry	*Agegilimwana*	She carried a baby
Yingilai	Get in	*Yingilaikuchumba cha vana*	Go to the children's room
Hegelela	Move/get close	*Nihegelelaikidogo*	Get close to me
Dumbukila	Fall into	*Kabomaadumbukilimumfuleni*	Kaboma has fallen into the river
Galawuka	Roll side and side	*Igana sana kugalawuka*	She/he likes rolling
Hovili	Lost	*Simu yaJanatuyihovili*	Janatu's phone is lost
Yagai	Get lost	*Mwana waTapeliayagili*	Tapeli's child has lost
Gwelili-	Fall in	*Yembeyigwelili pa msavati*	A mango has fallen on the sand
Kwelai-	Climb	*Kachecheikwelamlibiki*	Kacheche is climbing the tree
Bwela-	Come	*Bwelaibasi Joni*	Please come, John.
Hamba-	Go	*Hamba kwabibiyakuhinu*	Go to your grandmother now
Wusai-	move/take away	*Asha iwusasahani*	Asha takes away the utensils
Kuhuma –	From/coming from	*Amosiahumalilikuzomba*	Amosi is coming from Zomba
Gwai/ligwil-	Fell down	*Gari ya Juma yigwili*	Juma's Car fell down
Wuka-	Leave	*Mdala wakiawukililukela*	His wife left in the morning
Humbai-	Jump	*Liguluvilihumbilimfereji*	The pig jumped the canal
Helela	go down	*Helelaikumjini*	Go downtown
Kungena	Get in	*Baba angenisi gari*	Farther brought the Car in
Yepwiiki	Out of/escape	*Ayepwikikulabuliwa*	He/she escaped being punished

As shown in Table 1, both the people who were interviewed and the documents that were looked at agreed that movement deictic markers are an important part of human language. It was also discovered that the direction of the movement may be forward, backwards, up, or down, depending on the choice of deictic terms, the manner in which the movement is done, and the medium. Notable deictic terms include *humbai* (fly), *hambai* (go), *bwelai* (come), and *sambalila* (swim), which denote both the manner of movement and the medium of movement.

Furthermore, the study revealed that movement-deictic terms are distinguished from one another by frames of reference. The findings on movement deictics *Wuka, Hambai* (go), *Bwelai, Kiliwukai*, and *Wuyai* (come) seem to concur with Levinson's (2003) observation that there are various ways of describing objects' location, orientation, or movement concerning other objects. Furthermore, the descriptions of these movement-deictic terms are based on relative frames of reference. The concept or idea is formed based on the environmental gradient. However, Levinson did not include aspects of other prominent environmental features, such as buildings, in this study. In Kingoni, the relative frame of reference is also heavily used to construct the semantic meaning of each movement deictic term. The meaning of movement deictic terms associated with ups and downs is constructed based on the related frame of reference from which the concept or idea is built. This is contrary to Schokkin (2021), who says that in some languages, there are deictic terms with no specific direction. This study has noticed that every Kingoni motion deictic term has a specific direction, which helps the hearer to extract meaning.

Therefore, the idea and meaning of deictic terms associated with motion depend on the perceptions of the speaker and the listeners. When speaking or listening, the meaning is determined by the speaker's and perceiver's locations.

3.5.2 Demonstrative Deictic Markers

Demonstratives are crucial in communication, language, and cognition. They have to be interpreted concerning the location of participants in the context. They indicate a link between the figure and the ground through pointing.

The study revealed several words that the Ngoni use as demonstrative deictic markers, including *apa, apo, pala*, and *pale*. These demonstrative markers take four forms, depending on the degree of closeness or distance of the referent from the deictic centre.

The results showed that *apa*, one of the Kingoni demonstrative deictic markers, refers to a place that is near or proximal to the speaker or deictic centre, the referent point from which the meaning of an utterance is generated. For example, when referring to the mango's closeness, Speaker 7 said *Yembeyiviliapa*, meaning the mango is here, not far from the speaker.

Regarding apo, the field results indicate that it is a demonstrative deictic term in Kingoni, signifying or expressing the opposite of *apa*. The distinction is demonstrated by the degree of distance covered between the object being referred to and the speaker or hearer. The term *apo* is used to show or point at objects that are far from the speaker but near the hearer or perceiver. For example, speaker 1 said *lingulila ichikombi chivili payetutu apo* (check that the cup is just behind the house).

Evidently, the analysis revealed that the use of *pala* is linked to the distance maintained between the conversation participants and the object being referred to. Speaker 9 revealed that *pala* is used when the speaker indicates the location of a specific object, such as a river, school, church, or any other common object within the context. For instance, you might say, "*Wakahikai pa mfulenipala, cha papembeni kunaliganga*." As you approach the river, you will notice a stone on its side. *Pala* indicates that the object is some distance from the deictic centre.

On the other hand, *paléis*, a spatial deictic term in Kingoni, is used to express the object of a figure that is located far away from the speaker. The results from the interviews revealed that the term "*paléis*" refers to both "*isali*" and "*bahapa/papipi*." *Patali* serves to illustrate or indicate the distance an object is from the deictic center. *Bahapa/Papipiis* is used to indicate a near distance where an object is from the deictic terms.

The results on demonstrative deictics agree with Dancygier (2019), Sauppeand Mutlu (2024), and Jungbluth (2011, 2003), who found that the semantic and pragmatic meaning of any language depends on deixis. Moreover, the proximal or distal contrast of any deictic terms used is more relevant to meaning construction than the individual aspect of deixis.

3.5.3 Figure and Ground Deictics in Kingoni

The analysis of the interview results revealed that Kingoni uses figures and ground to establish frames of reference. It was also noted that the referent's point of view plays a vital role in communication. The results revealed that Kingoni uses deictic terms like *Kunyasi* (down the hill). The respondents revealed that this term is used to express an object that is located on the downside of the deictic center. Furthermore, the terms indicate that the ground has a slope, and the figure is situated at the base.

Hikai/wukai (arrive to/depart from), this is another way of expressing space in the Kingoni language. The respondents described these terms as being used to denote a zero frame of reference. For example, Speaker 3 stated, "*Kacheche* has arrived home." The *kunyumba* (home) here is a ground used as a reference point, while the *kacheche* is a figure. *Ahiki's* meaning varies depending on the figure and ground used in the utterance. This is similar to deictic terms like *ku/pa nani/nena* (on top of/up/above), *mumbele* (in front of), and *kuhyetu* (behind).

Kataoka (2019) and Grenoble (2014) also said that the way Japanese people use deictics depends on how they understand the language and context of the speech. These results about figures and ground deictics support these findings. In addition, the figure and ground in any utterance play a crucial role in signalling the

relationship between entities embodied in the sentence.

3.5.4 Body Sidedness for Figure and Ground in Kingoni

Linguistically, there is a front-back dimension of the human body, a left-right dimension, and up-downward dimensions, which help in describing the directions and sidedness of objects.

According to the study, the Ngoni speaker appeals to body-sidedness when referring to different objects being discussed. In the interviews, deictic terms such as *mumbele* (behind), *ku/palongolo* (in front of), *kumandyoli* (left-hand side), and *pa/kumangiga* (right-hand side) were not mentioned. For instance, Speaker 10 stated, "The man is behind the box." The figure represents the man, known as *Munu*, who occupies the back position, either behind the box or at the back, as seen from the viewpoint. The orientation is based on a horizontal axis, where the relationship between the figure, ground, and viewpoint is established. These findings about body-sidedness agree with Lyons (1977) and Levinson (2003) that "the figure" is the entity that a speaker seeks to locate in the coordinate system. The ground" is the entity about which the figure is located, and "the origin" is the centre of the frame of reference or the point where the axes meet. Furthermore, "the viewer" provides the perspective from which the entire scene is viewed, as well as the angular specification that indicates the angle or direction between the figure and the ground.

4.0 Conclusion

After examining Kingoni spatial deixis and its semantic orientation, this study concludes as follows: In contrast to the existing literature, the Kingoni language has five motion deictic terms that express two main concepts: go (*hambai, wukai*) and come (*bwelai, wuyai, kiliwukai*). In Kingoni, every motion or movement derivative term has a defined direction. These motion- or movement-deictic terms and associative directions contribute to generating meaning when communicating. Also, the study discovered that four spatial dimensions are used to assign or generate meaning. These dimensions are **near (*apa*), near-far (*apo*), far (*pala*), and far most (*Palé*).** These terms in

Kingoni are differentiated by a small distinction stimulated by morphological modifications. Furthermore, several Kingoni spatial deictic markers described by different FoRs (frames of reference) were noted. The use of FoRs helps the individuals to distinguish the distance between the figure and the deictic centre, hence generating meaning. It has been noticed that Kingoni native speakers have no specific preference for a frame of reference, as they keep shifting from one FoR to another in the same context. Kingoni has a relative frequency of reference that is projected by body-sidedness. It employs a ternary relationship, specifying the figure and ground in relation to the speaker's viewpoint. Spatial deictics such as *kumandyoli* (the left hand), *kumangiga* (the right hand), *kulongolo* (in front of), and *mumbele* (behind or at the back of) are used to project the image.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it puts forward the following recommendation that helps other users of Kingoni and linguists expand their knowledge: This is because it's crucial to understand how Deixis uses a specific language in communication. The use of deixis is also essential in various communications, especially formal ones.

Policymakers and educators should empathise with the use of natural language cases in teaching users to practice giving and following directions, describing locations, and understanding relationships between deictics. The languages seem to bring new insights and are easy for learners to comprehend. As evidenced in this study, in contrast to existing knowledge where deictic motion or movement may have no direct meaning, every deictic motion or movement term in Kingoni has a defined direction. Hence, natural language may be helpful for understanding deictic terms.

This study was strictly a semantic analysis of spatial deixis in Kingoni, not any other part of speech. It is expected that further research of the same nature will be done on other parts of speech, such as verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. This will broaden the understanding of other aspects of grammar, especially when the studies are conducted in the cognitive

semantics field. The theory of cognitive semantics is recent in linguistics. Therefore, it encourages more such studies, especially in Bantu languages.

Another area that the researcher would like to recommend for further study is the interface of spatial and non-spatial prepositions in Kingoni, because the study showed that there is a case where spatial and non-spatial prepositions are used interchangeably to locate the space. The functions of gaze, gestures, and body postures were not explored in this study; they were only mentioned during the analysis. Gestures, eye gaze, and body posture co-occur with talk about space. Therefore, further research may be done on the contribution of gestures, eye gaze, and body postures to spatial communication to further clarify spatial sentences in Kingoni.

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