

## **The Communicative Factors Revealed in the *Mother-In-Law* Family Drama in Citizen TV: Kenya**

**Orawo Akech Doreen**

Department of Communication  
University of Eldoret, KenyaD  
[doreen.orawo@yahoo.com](mailto:doreen.orawo@yahoo.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

Previous studies of Television programming have shown familial relationships portrayed in stereotypical ways, but none of them has narrowed down on determinants of the kind of relationship mothers-in-law have with their daughters-in-law. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the communicative determinants of the mother-in-law (MIL) and daughter-in-law (DIL) relationship as portrayed in the TV Family drama. The study analyzed eight Episodes of the drama, aired on Citizen TV Channel between August and September 2012. Critical content analysis was employed to analyse data, which was mainly qualitative. Quantitative data was generated by two coders who independently used a prepared code sheet to examine the descriptive aspects of each character and the qualitative aspects were defined by pre-determined categories. Reliability of the code sheet was established by piloting to determine inter-coder agreement. The study established that the relationship between MILs and DILs is a dialectical process, in which conflicts could potentially arise as a tussle between the needs for association and dissociation, certainty and uncertainty and openness and closeness and that the key locus of this dialectic process is the verbal interaction or communication between the parties. These findings are considered significant. The study recommends that, TV programs should avoid invariably casting MIL–DIL relationships in negative stereotypes; instead, they should occasionally come up with Episodes on how such relationships might be improved, using factors established in this study.

**Key Words: Mother-in-Law (MIL), Daughter-in-Law (DIL), Communicative Factors, Marriage**

## INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in marriages have been typical family problems for a long time. Marriage as noted by McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto (2005) is a normative transition which often leads to experiences of turbulence since it tends to change longstanding relationships and identities. Aspects of family relationships and interaction patterns usually have to be renegotiated. This act of renegotiation as observed by Turner, Young & Black (2006), calls for the need to balance multiple (and sometimes conflicting) communication goals that are inherent in interpersonal communication. For families to maintain successful relationships therefore there is a need to understand how they experience and negotiate periods of change.

One context in which this is especially true is the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, which may be a source of great difficulty in many marriages (Duvall, 1954). Epic battles between wives and their mothers-in-law are constant themes in literature from around the world. From Chaucer's *The Lawyer's Tale* (Chaucer, 1387 cited in Rosalyn, 2006) to Tennessee's (2004) *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are venomous power struggles between MIL and the women their sons married. Studies conducted on the in-law relationships are mainly found in Western countries. In one such study, Rawlins (1992) found that daughters-in-law perceive greater interpersonal distance and have more negative attitude towards mother's-in-law. Apter (2009) found that two-thirds of married British women complained of long-term unhappiness and stress because of friction with their mothers-in-law. Other studies from the West focused mainly on the nature of support between in-laws and their sons or daughters and found mothers-in-law to be supportive of sons than daughters-in-law. In a study among the Yorubas of South west Nigeria, Olutola (2012), found that MILs were often violent against their DILs, with most unmarried girls in the community preferring to marry men whose mothers were dead.

Although in-law relationships in non-western contexts such as Kenya may have varied meanings in respective contexts, exploring the dynamics of daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationships could help identify factors that may determine the relationship from among several categories which include tight-knit, distant, obligatory, estranged, cordial, and conflicted but affectionate.

Studies suggest that the nature of communication is a crucial factor in predicting MIL/DIL relationships. Markman *et al.* (1993) suggested that couples with communication-based risk factors (e.g., poor conflict management) and lower protective factors (low levels of positive communication) would be more vulnerable to the development of relationship problems. Karney and Bradbury (1979) in a study of 60 newly married couples found that more initial negative communication predicted steeper declines in satisfaction. Markman *et al.* (1993) reports that effective communication is pertinent in reducing marital distress in a 4 – 5 year study conducted to evaluate the effects of a marital distress prevention program. A corpus of research indicates that relationships in a marriage triad –between MIL, her sons and their wives – could be fraught with opposing tensions, for instance, the simultaneous need to be both connected/separate, more open/less open, and being certain/uncertain (Baxter, 2006). Studies suggest that proper communication between the parties concerned could help manage these tensions and enable a successful marriage (Baxter, 2006; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). However, no studies, situated in the Kenyan milieu, have looked at the in-law relationship from a communication perspective.

Cultural activities are currently inundated with depictions of problematic in-law relationships, more so in the case of mothers-in-law. Situational comedy (e.g. *Everybody Loves Raymond*) and television shows (e.g. those depicting mother-in-law) are now over amplifying these problematic relationships. Considering that television is the main source of entertainment and information in the contemporary society (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli, 1980, 1986; 2002), exposure to its messages has the potential to reiterate, confirm and cultivate beliefs, values and perspectives that it portrays. Consequently, continued exposure to negative images about mothers-in-law by the Television cultivates a mainstream view of how mothers-in-law are (cruel, dominant and intrusive). Besides, commodities of the television industry are derived from the interaction of social, cultural, and content standards. This implies that depictions of the mother-in-law are rooted in the belief that it is the norm.

The media is believed to play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions and opinions about political and social issues (Wilson & Wilson, 2001; Wimmer and Dominick, 1991). In light of the numerous social issues confronting families, the media has therefore been considered a critical tool that will be exploited to influence the behavior and perceptions of the viewer towards the specific social and political issues.

The negative images about Mothers in-law have permeated the Kenyan society. This has led to several local TV programmes whose themes centre on mother in-law daughter in-law conflicts. One such programme, *Mother-In-Law* has hit the airwaves since the year 2006 and this attests to the fact that much has thematically been dramatized. *Mother-In-Law* is a weekly drama series that has been aired since 2006 on Kenya's Citizen TV every Sunday at 7.35 p.m. and also repeated every Sunday in the afternoon at 4.15 p.m. This Family drama is demarcated into Episodes with each seemingly attempting to address a bundle of the unique familial issues differently. The episodic nature of the programme may have been precipitated by the nature of primary audience it addresses itself to; Mothers- in-law, sons and daughters-in-law. This sort of audience naturally desires to have their needs addressed hence the episodic nature of the programme. Secondly, as Wesonga (2012) notes, it is possible to maintain an attentive and loyal audience because the viewers are treated to interesting performances whose conflicts seem to address the issues at hand. This structural formation of *Mother-in-law* allows the audience to distinguish it from the numerous soap operas on the Kenyan screens going by their difference in length and approach at addressing familial issues. The brevity of the Episodes resonates with the limited time the producer adopts in creating conflicts.

According to Burton (2000), television drama series utilizes the conventions of both realism and melodrama. In this regard, realism focuses on the set conventions by which drama appears to be representative of the real world with motivated characters, recognizable locations and believable social problems. Using this perspective, it would appear that the "mother-in-law" drama series aired on Citizen Television and which is played in a recognizable location (typical Kenyan home) represents the real Kenyan context and believable social problems. In this programme, Charity is the character who acts the role of a mother-in-law. She plays so powerful a role that asserts authority and wants all other actors in the society to live an ideal life suitable to the extended African family life (Kaiga, 2012).

*Mother-In-Law* is a TV programme created and produced by professional script writers-who happen to be some of the characters in the drama, together with Catherine Wamuyu Kamau (a

producer and director at Royal Media Services). The series is set in a typical familial setting in one of the modern homes in Nairobi's Kahawa-Sukari estate which demonstrates the existence of middle class Kenyan family. The story depicts the actions of Mother-in-law towards the husband, sons, daughters-in-law and the grandchildren. More importantly, the focus of the series has its eyes trained on the relationship between Mother-in-law and daughters-in-law through the drama's plot. The other characters like the domestic workers, other in-laws, police inspector and politicians, have been used by the producer to enhance the portrayal of the conflicting issues and the advancement of the drama's central themes. The story has a complex plot with a storyline fraught with conflicts and counter conflicts as is evidenced in the analyzed Episodes.

The setting of the drama in Nairobi's Kahawa-Sukari Estate (which doubles as a high, middle level or slum setting, depending on the context of the drama) and the choice of props (both modern and ancient clothes) are in themselves similar with the audience. The Mother-in-law and daughters-in-law are given prominence to emphasize their role in the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship. The choice of characters reflects a familial set up to allow the programme cater for Kenya's ethnically diverse audience and consequently gain acceptability. The setting keeps shifting to offer the producer a window to reveal the issues in situation and specific Scenes that are identical with the Kenyan families. This allows for comfortable viewing by all the family members without further prejudice as was the intention of the producer.

Episodes in *Mother-In-Law* programme seek to portray the actors, their attitudes, behaviour patterns and perceptions, and how these elements can possibly impact on those watching the programme. The programme serves identity functions through a deliberately corroborated complex plot woven in a storyline to generate conflicts in the family set up, especially that between mother-in-law and daughters-in law.

So far, the production and showing of Mother-in-law can be described as successful in the recent years. In addition, findings from a survey by the East Africa's Independent Media Review (2009) quoted in Wesonga (2012) indicated that Mother-in-law enjoys a massive following and the biggest viewership among adult audience in Kenya. The programme, which has witnessed a steady growth of viewership, has had its popularity attributed to the characters, especially Charity (mother-in-law), the choice of costumes, identical family setting and the set of actors displayed. The producer has always strived to be 'real' by introducing a new cast to capture unique and emerging issues, and to allow those whose season in the programme has matured to exit such as Alison and Jack, (husband and wife), Salome, Sandra, Inspector Wasike, Beatrice and Alpha.

The quantity and quality of communication could be a crucial factor in predicting the nature of MIL/DIL relationships. A corpus of research indicates that relationships in a marriage triad – between MIL, her sons and their wives – are immanent with opposing tensions, for instance, the simultaneous need to be both connected/separated, more open/less open, and being certain/uncertain (Baxter, 2006; Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002). Studies suggest that proper communication between the parties concerned could help manage these tensions and enable a successful marriage (Baxter, 2006; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). However, a paucity of studies, situated in the Kenyan milieu, have not looked at the in-law relationship from a communication perspective. This study was therefore a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of a MIL – DIL drama on a Kenyan television network. The purpose of this study

was therefore, to examine the communicative determinants of the type of mother-in-law/daughter –in-law relationships as portrayed in the TV family drama (*Mother-In-Law*).

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the communicational factors in the *Mothers-In-Law* TV programme, by analyzing content of the TV program. The quantitative portion of the content analysis measured frequencies and other descriptive statistics of the sampled Mother-In-Law programme Episodes as defined by predetermined categories. The quantitative aspect of the content analysis also helped the researcher to establish communicative determinants of relationships by conducting multiple regression analysis. The qualitative content analysis helped to identify common themes that emerged from the analyzed episodes.

The target population for this study was all the episodes of the *Mother-in-Law* program aired since inception. Since the program was first aired in 1986 and considering that a single episode is shown every two weeks, the target population was 168 episodes. The study employed a purposive and convenience sampling of one TV drama series (*Mother-In-Law*), and eight Episodes drawn from the drama show. The content of the Episodes were analyzed to determine communicated themes of mothers-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Each Episode sampled was analyzed for the for the twenty five minutes on Sundays from 7.35 p.m. – 8.00 p.m. Table 3.1 presents a list of the characters sampled.

**Table 1: List of Characters in Sample**

<b>Name of Character</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Role in show</b>
(a) Charity	Female	Mother-in-law (unit of analysis)
(b) Mwamba	Male	Husband to Charity
(c) Robert	Male	Second born son to Charity
(d) Charlie	Male	Third born son to Charity
(e) Lisa	Female	Second daughter-in-law to Charity
(f) Celina	Female	Third daughter-in-law to Charity
(g) Joyce	Female	Other in-law to Charity
(h) Tina	Female	Granddaughter to Charity
(i) Mike	Male	Grand son
(j) Angie	Female	Grand daughter
(k) Olive	Female	Grand daughter
(l) Mama Alison	Female	Other-in-law
(m) Mustafa	Male	Other relation
(n) Wanande	Female	Other relation
(o) Maria	Female	Other relation
(p) Ninja	Male	Other relation
(q) Insp. Wasike	Male	Other relation
(r) Rasta	Male	Other relation

There was one code sheet for this content analysis. The code sheet was used to examine the descriptive aspects of each character and the qualitative aspects defined by the pre-determined categories. The first coding category consisted of Episodes (Episodes coded). The second coding category consisted of characters (The name of the character coded). The third coding category consisted of descriptive aspects of the characters (Role of character categorized as major or minor, age, and sex). The final coding consisted of the following pre-determined categories of relationships; relationship with Charity, behaviour exhibited by Charity (Mother-in-Law), characters personality traits, character relating with Charity, Charity support of marriage with spouse, character influence from others, spouse loyalty, cultural orientation and finally category of relationship with Charity.

The principal method of data analysis was a critical content analysis. The content of the sampled episodes was analysed for communicated themes. Descriptive statistics were used to rate, relate, compare, draw distinctions and present the frequency of character relationships with Charity as well as the frequency of behaviour exhibited by Charity to other characters. Multiple regression analysis was used to explore the communicative determinants of category of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Synopsis of the Analyzed Episodes**

The following is a brief account of the eight episodes analysed in the study:

#### ***Season 15, Episode 1 and 2***

Lisa is planning Robert's (her husband) birthday party. She sends her step daughters (Angie and Olive) to place an order for a cake for the occasion from Nelly's place. While walking to the place, they are kidnapped by Onyi, Champez and an unnamed driver. The kidnapping is witnessed by Ninja (the watchman), who informs Charity's family. This sends Charity's family (Charity, Mwamba, Charlie and Robert) into confusion. This provides the context in which Charity launches an emotional attack on Lisa and Celina, accusing them of having engineered the kidnap. The men in the family (Mwamba, Charlie and Robert) are more cool-headed, informing the police and looking for ransom money. Meanwhile, Joyce (Charlie's former boyfriend and mother to Olive) exhibits false outrage, joining Charity in pillorying Lisa and Celina as the "evil witches", responsible for kidnapping her daughter. Mwamba pays the ransom, leading to the release of Angie and Olive. The second episode ends with the revelation that Joyce and Olive, arranged for the kidnapping of the latter, so that they could get part of the ransom money.

#### ***Season 15, Episode 3 and 4***

Charity is locked up in a police cell for 18 hours for having a knife in her handbag. When she returns home, she's pissed that no one cared. She packs her items and leaves the house for an undisclosed place. Meanwhile, Alpha comes to Charity's house to thank Mike (who has attempted to commit suicide), for saving his life by donating O - negative blood to him. A flirtatious relationship develops between Angie and Alpha.



### ***Season 15, Episode 5***

It has been two days since Charity disappeared and Robert, Charlie and Mwamba are getting frantic, with no information about her. They search in hospitals and mortuaries for her. Maria, the house help, overhears a conversation between Lisa and Celina and discovers that it is Lisa who put the knife in Charity's handbag, leading to her arrest. Meanwhile, the relationship between Alpha and Angie continues to blossom.

### ***Season 15, Episode 6***

The search for Charity continues, with Charlie coming across as the most affected by her disappearance, compared to Mwamba and Robert. Maria takes advantage of Lisa and Celina's secret, making them massage, fan and wash clothes for her, in order for Maria to keep the secret. Towards the end the episode, Charity reappears with the chief from her hideout, which turned out to be a women organisation camp. She had hoped that her disappearance, could make her family miss her and become close to her but it is apparent that the opposite effect is achieved.

### ***Season 15, Episode 7***

Angie and Alpha come back home after spending a night at the latter's home without telling anybody. Robert is forced to call Alpha's mother. Meantime, Charity attempts to make peace with Mwamba after her disappearance. When Alpha's mother arrives at Charity's home, she turns out to be the long lost daughter of Charity and Mwamba called Betty. The scene ends with the happy reunion of the Mwamba's family.

### ***Season 16, Episode 1***

Mwamba wants Charlie and Robert to move out of the family house but Charity is opposed, accusing Mwamba of greed. Lisa meets Jacob, her former classmate, in a restaurant to discuss the possibility of him selling a house to Lisa. Unfortunately, Lisa had not told Robert of her plans since she wanted to present the house as a birthday gift to Robert. Robert spies Lisa and Jacob in intimate conversation at the restaurant and thinks Lisa is cheating on him. When Lisa returns home, she finds a furious Robert. It is only Mwamba's intervention that helps to cool down Robert.

### **Character Presentation**

The characters were categorized according to their relationship with Charity (who was the unit of analysis). Consequently, the characters were categorized as the husband, son, daughter-in-law, other in-law, grandchild, or other relation. As shown in Table 4.1, one character "Mwamba" was coded as Charity's husband. Coder 1 recorded 19 incidences in which Mwamba appeared while coder 2 recorded 18 incidences. Two characters "Charlie" and "Robert" were identified as Charity's sons. Both the coders recorded 15 incidences in which the sons appeared. Two characters Selina and Lisa featured as Charity's daughters-in-law. Both the coders each recorded a total of 16 incidences in which the daughters-in-law appeared. One character "Betty" was identified as the daughter to Charity and appeared once according to the coders. Four grandchildren "Angie", "Mike", "Olive" and "Tina" were also identified.

**Table 2: Characters by relationship with Charity**

Relationship with Charity	Character	Coder 1	Coder 2	Total Incidences
Husband	Mwamba	19(51.4%)	18(48.6%)	37
Son	Charlie	11(50.0%)	11(50.0%)	22
Son	Robert	4(50.0%)	4(50.0%)	8
Daughter-in-law	Lisa	9(50.0%)	9(50.0%)	18
Daughter-in-law	Celina	7(50.0%)	7(50.0%)	14
Daughter	Betty	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	2
Other in-law	Joyce	4(57.1%)	3(42.9%)	7
Other in-law	Mama Alison	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	6
Grand child	Angie	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	6
Grand child	Mike	4(50.0%)	4(50.0%)	8
Grand child	Olive	2(50.0%)	2(50.0%)	4
Grand child	Tina	4(50.0%)	4(50.0%)	8
Other relation	Alpha	2(66.7%)	1(33.3%)	3
Other relation	Insp. Wasike	2(50.0%)	2(50.0%)	4
Other relation	Maria	3(60.0%)	2(40.0%)	5
Other relation	Mustafa	2(50.0%)	2(50.0%)	4
Other relation	Ninja	4(57.1%)	3(42.9%)	7
Other relation	Ras	4(57.1%)	3(42.9%)	7
Other relation	Wanande	2(50.0%)	2(50.0%)	4

The two coders each reported a total of 13 incidences involving the grandchildren. Two characters “Joyce” and “Mama Alison” also featured as other in-laws to Charity. Coder 1 recorded a total of 7 incidences involving other in-laws while coder 2 recorded 6 incidences involving other in-law. The last category of characters “Alpha”, “Inspector Wasike”, “Maria”, “Mustafa”, “Ninja”, “Ras”, and “Wanande” were identified as other relations to Charity. Coder 1 recorded 19 incidences in which other relations appeared while coder 2 recorded a total of 15 incidences.

### **Communicative Factors in *Mother – In – Law* Family Drama**

The relationship between MILs and DILs was found to be a dialectical process, in which conflicts could potentially arise as a tussle between the needs for association and dissociation, certainty and uncertainty and openness and closedness and that the key locus of this dialectic process is the verbal interaction between the parties. The following section therefore presents the analysis of language in the *Mother-in-Law* program.

#### ***(1) Types of Language used in the Drama***

The characters in the drama exhibit different linguistic styles, suggesting non-uniformity of their educational and social backgrounds. For the most part, the main characters (Charity, Mwamba, Robert, Charlie, Lisa, and Celina) and their progeny (Tina, Olive, Mike, and Alpha) converse in a ‘naturalistic’, Standard English language prose, delivered in an informal, conversational idiom.



This suggests that Mwamba and his family are fairly educated, possibly belonging to the bourgeois, with their proclivity for respectability and materialism. This is in contrast to the linguistic style of their workers (Ninja, Mustafa, Wanande, and Maria) who consistently use 'sheng' when communicating, which pointed to a modest education and lower class upbringing. This distinctness in language of the Mwamba family and his workers suggest a potential dialectical conflict of autonomy/connection: the need for the workers and Mwambas to be more autonomous or more connected. In the drama, the workers tend to keep their own company, interacting with the Mwamba family only when necessary, for instance, when Charlie is thanking Ras, for his excellent work in Episode 1 of Season 15. However, the analysis of this tension is complicated by the fact that the workers are the employees of Mwamba, and hence, are expected to keep some distance from their employer, anyway.

Occasionally, Charity and Mwamba use Kiswahili when speaking. For instance, in Episode 1, Mwamba asks Charity, 'Nipe Chai', who in turn responds, 'Badohaijaiva'. This is in keeping with the fact the couple is old, who might not view the ability to speak English all the times as a badge of honour for the middle class. Their Kiswahili is almost formal, and if mixed with English, the Kiswahili and English words remain distinct, indicating a couple who grew up when 'sheng' was not common. Interestingly, both Lisa and Celina can switch effortlessly from English to 'sheng' for instance, when talking to Maria in Episode 5. However, throughout the Episodes, Charlie and Robert use only English. For example, in Episode 1, Scene 4, although Ninja uses 'sheng' throughout to address his interlocutor, Charlie; the latter responds during the whole course of the discourse in English. This suggested that whereas Charlie and Robert come across as stiff characters who are conscious of their middle class status, Lisa and Celina appear to be more sociable, probably indicating that they could have 'married upwards' into the Mwamba family. The use of 'sheng' by Lisa, Celina and Maria in Episode 5 could be put down to an attempt by Lisa and Celina to 'lower themselves' to the level of Maria, in order to appease her. However, the use by Lisa of 'Hi' and 'Baby' to address Robert and Charlie in Episode 1 of Season 16, is consistent with the sociability of the DILs in the drama. Tina, Angie, Olive and Alpha never use 'sheng' throughout the Episodes, even when discoursing amongst themselves, which is unlike other younger people in Kenyan society today. This suggested that they, like their uncles, are conscious of their middle class status.

## **(2) Turn Management in MIL Program**

The Episodes analyzed contain turns (the enactment of a speaker's right to speak by taking an opportunity to speak in a speech event or situation) (Sacks *et al.* 1978; Levinson 1983) of various lengths, suggesting that the author uses the concept of turn-length to convey different meanings in different contexts. Whenever they interact, Charity's turns are longer than both Lisa's and Celina's turns, suggesting that Charity is the dominant character when juxtaposed with the DILs, who come across as subdued and minimalist respondents. For instance, in Episode 1 of Season 15, Scene 7, the average turn-length for Charity is 18 words compared to Lisa's 3.3 and Celina's 10.5 words. This is in accordance with the overbearing character of the MIL in the drama when interacting with the DILs. Turn-length exposes the dialectical tension of expression/non-expression between the MIL and her DILs. The MIL comes across as somebody who bares all her feelings (mostly unfavourable) towards her in-laws. The DILs cope with the MIL's verbal assault differently. Whereas Celina attempts to match it, Lisa retreats into a 'cocoon' of non-

expression. Thus, Lisa tries to cope with the tension by tolerating it whereas Celina attempts to get even with the MIL.

On the other hand, when Charity interacts with her husband, their turns are either both long and multi-clause or short, that is, they always match, suggesting equality in the control of incipient conflict between them. Similarly, the discourse between Mwamba, Charlie and Robert is characterized by turns of almost equal length, smooth turn change, and equivalent distribution of turns, showing mutual respect and a comity amongst them.

### **(3) (Im)Politeness in MIL's Dramatic Dialogue**

In addressing the DILs, Charity uses strong and particularly threatening language, for instance, calling them '*Devils*', '*Criminals*', '*Murderers*', '*these Women*', '*you both burn in hell*', and '*Evil Womb*', showing a strained relationship between the MIL and DILs. The language adopted by Charity is also impolite since it attacks the positive faces (the want to be approved of, such as, the need for one's existence to be acknowledged or one's opinions to be approved) (Brown and Levinson, 1987) of both Lisa and Celina. There are many other instances in the Episodes where Charity uses impolite and rude language towards the DILs, suggesting distaste for the DILs. For example, in Episode 1 of Scene 7, Charity's imperative command, '*Lisa! Celina! Come here*', threatens the negative faces (the want to be unimpeded) (Brown and Levinson, 1987) of both Lisa and Celina. If all she wanted was the DILs to come, she could have used more polite language rather than treating adult women as if they were small children. The exclamation mark at the end of each name emphasizes the peremptory command. In Episode 4, Scene 5, Charity asks the DILs, '*who between you is behind this*', which is rude as it threatens the negative faces of the DILs. Charity impoliteness also extends to Mwamba, for instance, calling him '*Greedy*' in Season 16, Episode 1, which is threatening to his positive face. In Scene 5, Episode 1, Mwamba's imperious command '*Nipe chai*' is particularly threatening to Charity's negative face, who equally curtly responds, '*Badohaijaiva*'. This shows that both Mwamba and Charity can both use impolite language to each other. Again, the impoliteness exposes the dialectical tension of expression/non-expression in the MIL-DIL relationship, in which the MIL has a mouthful to speak whereas the DILs tend to say less.

Conversely, the discourse between Mwamba and the DILs is marked by polite language, which shows respectful and positive relationship between them. For instance, in Scene 3 of Episode 4, Lisa tells Mwamba to '*enjoy your breakfast*', which is a negative face supporting act, because the utterance allows Mwamba to enjoy his breakfast unimpeded. In the same Scene, Mwamba apologizes on behalf of Charity to the DILs, remarking that '*it was not fair*' and adds '*God's blessings will be upon you*', which are both statements that support positive faces of the DILs. Mwamba concludes the Scene by saying, '*you are welcome*', which can be construed to mean that Mwamba is willing to support the DILs' positive faces in future (since the utterance is an acknowledgement by Mwamba of the splendid work done by Lisa. There exists a potential dialectical tension between Mwamba and the DILs of association/dissociation, that is, they might chose to be close to each other or far apart. The discourse in the drama suggests that they negotiate this dialectical tension by associating more with each other.

The canonical participant structure in the Episodes is the '*single floor, one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time*' – with one speaker speaking and the others cast as addressees, in a Speaker – Hearer(s)

configuration. However, there are several times when Charity interrupts the speeches of the DILs, stemming the flow of their talk and blocking their access to the floor. For instance, in Episode 1, Scene 7, when Celina tries to explain the errand on which Lisa had sent Angie and Olive, Charity cuts in saying, *'Oh yes indeed. She sent them to get kidnapped, didn't she?'* This suggested that Charity is rude to the DILs and wants to dominate the conversation with the DILs. This is supported by the fact that in encounters with the DIL, Charity tends to be the focal point of the conversation, launching barbs against the DILs who are forced on their defensive against Charity's frontal attacks. For example, in Scene 7, Episode 1 Charity rages, *'I will not. I will not calm down until these two criminals tell me what they did with my grand daughters'*. In another turn, she says, *'Stop acting like you don't know. Wait till the police get here.'* Moreover, yet in another, she declares, *'...Why did it have to happen this time that you sent them?'* After spending 18 hours in a police cell, Charity storms the house and accuses the DILs, thus *'Who between you is behind this?'* When Celina tries to inquire, *'Behind what'*, Charity launches another attack, *'...Who was it?'* when Lisa tries to respond, another of Charity's accusation ensues, *'How come none of you bothered to find out where I spent the night?'*

Charity, by liberally doling out abuses at her DILs, prevents her from becoming close to them. The DILs cope by either tolerating the rants as inevitable unpleasantness or they also get even by the inversion of the aggression (for instance, when Lisa puts a knife in Charity's handbag). This implies that the dialectical tension of association/dissociation is not successfully managed by the MIL-DIL in the drama. Consequently, throughout the eight episodes analyzed, the tension between the MIL and DILs is unrelenting.

#### ***(4) Implicature and Convention in MIL Drama Language***

The strained relationship between Charity and the DILs is also evidenced by implicatures arising from their conversations (inferences drawn from the failure by an interlocutor to observe the rules of conversation called Maxims) (Grice, 1981). When Angie and Olive are kidnapped, Charity violates Grice's Maxim of Quality (*'Don't say what you believe to be false'* and *'Don't say that for which you lack adequate evidence'*) a number of times. For example, in Episode 1, Charity claims, *'I know the devils who are behind this'*. In another turn, she asks, *'Where have you taken Angie and Olive?'* She adds in yet another turn, *'She sent them to get kidnapped, didn't she?'* Since Charity makes these accusations without adequate evidence, the implicature to be drawn from this Episode is that she wants the world to believe that her DILs are evil and malevolent people. Charity also offers more explanation than is necessary, and hence, she flouts Grice's Maxim of Quantity (*'Don't make your contribution more informative than is required'*). For instance, in Scene 12 of Episode 1, when Detective Omar asks Charity why the DILs would want to get rid of Olive, Charity instead of being content to explain that Celina is not comfortable being a second wife, goes on to add, superfluously, about Celina evil womb. The inference to be drawn is that Charity hates her DILs because she is determined to do everything, by adducing irrelevant details, to implicate them in the kidnap of her grandchildren. Again, these outbursts prevent Charity from successfully negotiation the dialectical tension of association/dissociation with her daughters, who as a result remain distant to her.

Even if Charity's unreasonable outbursts in Episode 1 could be put to the shock of kidnapping her grandchildren, her continued flouting of the expected rules of conversation in later Episodes suggested a deep-seated dislike for her DILs. For example, in Episode 2 during her conversation

with Joyce, Charity refers to Lisa and Celina as the usual suspects without any evidence, again violating Grice's Maxim of Quality. Furthermore, her usage of the term usual implied that she has a history of blaming her DILs, whenever anything goes awry.

The aversion between the MIL and DILs in the drama appears to be mutual. Lisa in Episode 4, Scene 3 professes ignorance when asked by Mwamba where Charity could be. In turn 2, when asked where Charity is, Lisa responds, *'I don't know. I thought you guys were together in Athi River'*, and in turn 4, she adds, *'Well I don't know where she is. You know she doesn't like letting people in on her business'*. This violates Grice's Maxim of Quality because we are told in Episode 5, Scene 3 that it was Lisa who put the knife in Charity's bag and called the police on her. Thus, it would be reasonable to expect that Lisa would know the place where Charity could be or at the very minimum told Mwamba that she could be in problems with the police. The fact that she pretended to know nothing implies that she also dislikes Charity. The DILs again violate Grice's Maxim of Quality in Episode 4, Scene 5 when Charity, asks them who is responsible for her being locked up in a police cell. Lisa responds, *'What are you talking about?'* implicating the fact that they are innocent when in reality they authored Charity's tribulations. This is confirmed when Charity leaves, Celina triumphantly remarks, *'Serves her right'* and Lisa adds, *'Yes. That should teach her a valuable lesson in life'*.

#### **(5) Power Relations in MIL Drama**

The MIL, by virtue of her older age and being the mother of the DIL's husband is invested with social and institutional power arising from master and situational identities (West and Zimmerman, 1985), and is therefore, expected to be a more powerful discursal participant compared to the DIL. This can be seen in some instances in the drama, for example, in Episode 1, Scene 7, Charity commands Lisa and Celina to, *'Come here'*, and they obey. However, Charity does not get her way all the times, suggesting that the MIL and the DILs are engaged in combat in the drama, with each party giving as much as they get. For instance, in Episode 1, Scene 1, Charity's attempt to be told the *'top secret'* fails, despite her social and institutional power. This despite the fact that Angie and Olive who are children had been entrusted with the secret. This failure by Charity to elicit the secret from the DILs indicates equality between them with regard to discursive power. Thus, although the MIL comes up with schemes to humiliate the DILs, the latter are not wholly subservient; sometimes coming up with counter-schemes of their own to demean the MIL.

The DILs dislike for Charity is in contrast with their husbands, who consistently are shown to love their mother. For example, both Charlie and Robert, throughout the drama address Charity as either, *'mother'* or *'mom'*, which shows that they respect her. Even when Charity is pissed after spending time in a police cell and tells Robert, *'Don't hey mom me'*, Robert persists in using the deferential moniker, *'mom'*. Thus, *'Mom I just arrived'* and in another turn, in Episode 5, Scene 2, *'Mom! Mom! What's up with her?'* When Charity disappears, Charlie does not even react to Mama Alison's entreaties to relax and does not want to eat any food prepared by Mama Alison because he is worried of his mother, which shows that he loves his mother. In Episode 6, Scene 1, Charlie bursts out, *'My mother could be dead and you are standing there telling me to relax'*. Similar feelings can be seen in Robert, and even in Mwamba himself. However, Charlie comes across as being more emotionally distressed by Charity's disappearance compared

to Robert, probably because he is the younger of the two, and therefore, he is more attached to his mother.

The drama also reveals a dialectical tension between the sons of Mwamba and their wives. The most striking can be seen in Episode 1 of Season 16, in which Lisa's attempt to present a birthday gift of house to her husband, is misconstrued as Lisa engaging in an extra-marital relationship, making Robert to be furious. This exposes the dialectic of predictability/novelty, which is aptly captured when Mwamba remarks that, '*men ... are not structured for surprises*'.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### ***Conclusion***

This study analysed the communicative determinants of the type of MIL – DIL as portrayed in the *Mother-in-Law* TV program. The study concluded that the relationship between MILs and DILs is a dialectical process, in which conflicts could potentially arise as a tussle between the needs for association and dissociation, certainty and uncertainty and openness and closeness and that the key locus of this dialectic process is the verbal interaction between the parties. The study established that independence in the family set up, familial identity, supportive communication, sense of belonging, accommodation, and cultural orientation were the main themes communicated in the drama. The study's findings largely support the communication accommodation theory, in which there is likely to be less conflict among interlocutors if they are more accommodative with respect to their communication.

### ***Recommendations***

In view of the above findings, the following recommendations are made

1. Owing to the power of the media as a communication tool, TV programs should avoid invariably casting MIL – DIL relationships in negative stereotypes; instead, they should occasionally come up with episodes on how such relationships might be improved.
2. Married and people entering into marriage must ensure that there is supportive and honest communication between parties in order to manage the dialectical tensions, which characterize the marriage institution.

## REFERENCES

- Apter, T. (2012). *What do you really want from me?: Learning to get along with in-laws*. London, WW Norton & Co.
- Baxter, L. A. & Braithwaite, D. O. (2008). Relational dialectics theory: Crafting meaning from competing discourses. In L. A. Baxter, ed. & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication* (pp. 349–362). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baxter, L. A. (2006). Relational Dialectics Theory: Multivocal dialogues of family communication. In D. O. Braithwaite, ed. & L. A. Baxter (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication* (pp. 130–145). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burton, G. (2000). *Talking Television: An introduction to the study of television*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.



- Duvall, E. R. M. (1954). *In-laws, pro & con: an original study of inter-personal relations*. Association Press.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). "The Mainstreaming" of America: Violence Profile No. 11", *Journal of Communication*, 30:3, 10-29.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). "Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process" in J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (2002). "Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective" in M. Morgan (Ed.), *Against the mainstream: The selected works of George Gerbner* (pp.193-213). New York: Peter Lang.
- Grice, H.P. (1981). 'Presupposition and Conversational Implicature', in P. Cole (ed.) *Radical Pragmatics*, New York: Academic Press, 183–98.
- Hoppe-Nagao, A., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2002). Relational dialectics and management strategies in marital couples. *Southern Communication Journal*, 67, 142-159.
- Kaiga, N. (2012). Mother-in-law and son-in-laws. *Nation newspapers*. Nairobi
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychological bulletin*, 118(1), 3.
- Markman, H., Renick, M., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A 4- and 5-year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61 (1): 70-77.
- McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J., & Garcia-Preto, N. (Eds.).(2005). *Ethnicity and family therapy*. Guilford Press.
- Olutola, F. (2012). Wife-Mother-in-Law relationship and violence among Yoruba women of SouthWestern Nigeria. *American Journal of Sociological Research*, 2 (2):11-18.
- Rawlins, W. R. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics and the life course*. New York: Aldine deGruyter.
- Rosalyn, R. (2006). *Critical companion to Chaucer: a literary reference to his life and work*. New York: Facts on File, 169.
- Tennessee, W. (2004). *Cat on a hot tin roof*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2004.
- Turner, M., Young, C. R., & Black, K. I. (2006). Daughters-in-Law and Mothers-in-Law Seeking Their Place Within the Family: A Qualitative Study of Differing Viewpoints. *Family Relations*, 55(5), 588-600.
- Wesonga, R. (2012). Localized nuances of linguistic choices in film: A Kenyan TV drama. *International J. Soc. Sci. and Education*, 2 (4): 44-48.
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (1985) 'Gender, Language and Discourse', in T.A. van Dijk (ed.) *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* 4, London: Academic Press, 103– 24.
- Wilson, A. D. (2004). Touch Light: an imaging touch screen and display for gesture-based interaction. In *Proceedings of the 6th international Conference on Multimodal interfaces* (State College, PA, USA, October 13 - 15, 2004). ICMI '04.ACM, New York, NY, 69-76.
- Wimmer, R.D. & Dominick, J.R. (1997). *Mass Media Research: an Introduction*, London: Wadsworth.



