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## Compliance-Gaining Strategies in Xitsonga Literary Text

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**Abstract:** *Compliance-gaining in literary texts shows how authors use characters' persuasive strategies to influence others, reflecting interpersonal, education, marketing, leadership, and social contexts. This study explores how compliance-gaining strategies are used in a Xitsonga literary work, showing how the author and characters intentionally use language to exert influence, foster cooperation, or resolve conflict. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study is grounded in Robert Cialdini's Compliance-Gaining Theory (CGT). Data was purposively drawn from the Xitsonga play 'Byi n'wi khele matluka' (2004) by M. Malungana and analysed using thematic analysis. The study findings highlight various compliance-gaining strategies used by Malungana's characters to influence the behaviour of others. These include reinforcing group norms and a sense of urgency, invoking fear and rational arguments, appealing to spiritual authority and religious merit, glorifying wealth, and using politeness and blessings to encourage prompt compliance. These strategies align with Cialdini's CGT principles of social influence and reflect deeply embedded communicative norms within Xitsonga literary text. Through an exploration of the relationship between language, culture, and persuasion, the study offers valuable insights into the communicative role of literature within African contexts. It underscores the importance of Xitsonga narratives in influencing societal attitudes and behaviours.*

**Keywords:** Cialdini's principles; compliance-gaining strategies; compliance-gaining theory; literary text; Xitsonga

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### Introduction

Language is not merely a tool for conveying ideas; it functions as a potent social instrument that shapes human relationships, cultural practices, and communal values (Bonvillain, 2019). Beyond facilitating communication and the transmission of knowledge, language plays a vital role in persuasion, negotiation, and influence. In multilingual and culturally diverse contexts such as those found across Africa, language is intricately linked to social customs and belief systems (Lo Bianco, 2010). Spencer and Petersen (2020) noted that storytelling, proverbs, oral traditions, and written texts all serve to reinforce social structures and normative behaviours. Within this communicative power of language lies a fundamental function: the ability to influence others, often referred to by communication

theorists as compliance-gaining strategies. Compliance-gaining refers to the use of communicative methods to persuade individuals to adopt specific actions or attitudes (Wilson, 2010; Dlali & Mutsvairo, 2020). It involves the deliberate and strategic use of language to shape behaviours and decisions in alignment with the speaker's intentions (Kiljan, 2023). Unlike coercion, which depends on force or threats, compliance-gaining relies on psychological, emotional, and social appeals. Rooted in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, it highlights how language is employed purposefully within social interactions (Mutsvairo, 2018). In literature, particularly within indigenous or culturally grounded narratives, compliance-gaining may emerge subtly through dialogue, narrative structure, and rhetorical devices, illustrating how language is used to communicate values, enforce norms, and mediate conflict.

Xitsonga, one of South Africa's official languages, boasts a rich tradition of both oral and written literature that reflects the cultural values, moral frameworks, and social relationships of the Vatsonga (Chauke, 2022; Mlambo et al., 2025). Its literary forms, including folktales, poetry, novels, short stories, and drama offer fertile ground for exploring how characters and narrators employ compliance-gaining strategies to persuade and influence others (Khoza, 2006; Mathye, 2022). These narratives often depict characters navigating complex social hierarchies, familial duties, romantic entanglements, and ethical dilemmas which all involve nuanced forms of persuasion. Despite this, there remains a notable gap in scholarly attention to the discourse-pragmatic dimensions of such strategies in Xitsonga literature. Existing research tends to emphasise characterisation, thematic, stylistic, or structural linguistic features, often overlooking the ways in which persuasion is encoded both linguistically and culturally. This oversight highlights a broader issue: the marginal integration of African indigenous languages into global academic discourse on interpersonal communication and rhetorical theory. While compliance-gaining strategies have been extensively examined in Western contexts such as interpersonal relationships, advertising, and organisational communication (Young, 2020; Harris, 2021; Kiljan, 2023), there is a scarcity of studies investigating how these strategies are articulated within Xitsonga literary texts. This lack of representation not only limits our understanding of Xitsonga's pragmatic richness but also undermines the broader recognition of African rhetorical traditions in global scholarship.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the use and function of compliance-gaining strategies in Xitsonga literary text. It aims to uncover how authors use characters to strategically use language to exert influence, gain cooperation, or resolve disputes. The study is guided by the following objectives: (i) to identify and classify the types of compliance-gaining strategies used in Xitsonga literary text, (ii) to examine the linguistic and cultural features that accompany these strategies and (iii) to explore how compliance-gaining reflects and reinforces social norms, power relations, and ethical values within Xitsonga-speaking communities. By analysing how compliance-gaining strategies function in Xitsonga literary texts, the study advances our knowledge of Xitsonga pragmatics while affirming the intellectual and communicative richness of African literary traditions. It also offers insights into indigenous models of communication, which are essential for culturally responsive education, counseling, and community development.

### **Brief overview of the play *Byi n'wi Khele Matluka***

*Byi n'wi khele matluka* is a drama that revolves around Pastor Pfumela, the leader of the Church of All Creatures and the husband of Gavaza. Although he is deeply committed to his religious duties, Pastor Pfumela frequently expresses frustration to his wife about his persistent financial difficulties. Nonetheless, he initially enjoys respect and admiration within the community due to his apparent dedication to church work. Pastor Pfumela's life takes a dramatic turn when a criminal syndicate known as *The Holy Service* approaches him. The group comprising of Tshovansimbi, Madlayisana, Cukumetani and Masirheni exploits his role as an importer of Bibles from America for church use. They propose using his name and address to smuggle drugs concealed in boxes of Bibles, a strategy intended to evade suspicion. During their visit, Gavaza is asked to excuse herself while the group privately presents their offer, promising Pastor Pfumela wealth in exchange for his cooperation. After several days of deliberation, he agrees to participate and vows to keep the operation secret.

Pastor Pfumela's involvement entails collecting the boxes from the post office, ostensibly sent by Tshovansimbi and Cukumetani, who pose as employees of an American Bible publishing company. The concealed drugs are later delivered to Masirheni and Madlayisana, who distribute them. From the proceeds, Pastor Pfumela is rewarded with money, a car and a cellphone. Despite his criminal activities, he continues to preach during church services, deceitfully attributing his newfound wealth to the power of prayer, fully aware that it is derived from drug trafficking. Suspicion arises when Ryaan, a post office employee, questions Pastor Pfumela about his

frequent collections of parcels. Disturbed by this scrutiny, Pastor Pfumela alerts Madlayisana and Masirheni, who decide to eliminate Ryaan. On the day of the planned murder, Gavaza visits Mavis, Ryaan's wife, to borrow items for a church conference. Madlayisana and Masirheni subsequently shoot and kill Ryaan, Mavis and Gavaza. Although Pastor Pfumela knows the perpetrators, he refrains from reporting the crime to the police, fearing exposure of his own complicity. Instead, he accepts money from Madlayisana and Masirheni under the guise of "condolences." While other church leaders caution him against his association with *The Holy Service*, he denies any involvement.

Subsequently, Masirheni is killed by the police after being caught selling drugs. Madlayisana informs Pastor Pfumela that Masirheni's death is a relief, as his loose talk threatened to expose the entire operation. Pastor Pfumela and Madlayisana continue their illicit activities until Pastor Pfumela is stopped at a police roadblock while transporting boxes of Bibles containing drugs. The drugs are discovered during the search, leading to Pastor Pfumela's arrest.

## Literature review

Research on compliance-gaining has increasingly moved beyond its traditional Western-centric roots to encompass the culturally nuanced and relationally embedded ways in which influence is exercised in everyday communication. Dlali and Mutsvairo (2020) offer a compelling example of this shift by investigating compliance-gaining strategies in Shona marital relationships, a relatively underexplored domain in African sociolinguistics. Anchored in theoretical models such as the Goals-Plans-Action (GPA) framework, the Subjective Expected Utility model, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, their study demonstrates how influence goals are formed, negotiated, and expressed through culturally appropriate communicative acts. Drawing on participant observation and discourse analysis, they show that compliance such as a wife's request for permission to style her hair was often achieved through a mixture of direct appeals, emotional persuasion, and culturally embedded argumentation. This blend of rhetorical strategy and socio-relational sensitivity underscores how persuasion is deeply rooted in broader social structures, such as patriarchy and communal obligation, rather than being purely individualistic or strategic.

While Dlali and Mutsvairo's work situates compliance-gaining in a spousal context shaped by traditional African values, Bevan et al. (2003) explore a similarly intimate, yet distinct, context: post-romantic reconciliation among university students in the United States. Their study extends compliance-gaining research into the realm of romantic reconnection, examining how individuals attempt to persuade former partners to resume a relationship. Using open-ended survey responses coded through established typologies (Marwell and Schmitt 1967; Wiseman & Schenk-Hamlin, 1981), the authors identified a wide range of strategies, including explanations, referent appeals, and apologies that were used in an adaptive, often sequential manner. Significantly, the study found that individuals with higher confidence and persistence employed more diverse and strategic approaches, while those with residual emotional closeness to their ex-partners were less motivated to initiate reconciliation. This suggests that the perceived relational dynamics and emotional readiness of both parties can shape the type and intensity of compliance-gaining behaviours.

Sadiki's, (2017) analysis of Tshivenda literature complements this view by situating interpersonal persuasion within cultural and literary narratives. Using the GPA model, the author demonstrated how compliance-gaining messages in traditional drama and prose texts reflect goal-oriented communication patterns, incorporating strategies such as manipulation, propaganda, coercion, and fear appeals. These literary examples illustrate how compliance-gaining is embedded in cultural norms and evolves alongside societal shifts. Particularly significant is the recognition of resistance, such as topic avoidance, as an inherent aspect of interpersonal influence. This perspective aligns with Western frameworks like the GPA model, which acknowledges the presence of constraints and obstacles in compliance-gaining processes. The study underscores the adaptive nature of interpersonal influence, showing that strategy selection is contextually informed and psychologically motivated.

Boster et al. (2009) introduced the "dump-and-chase" method, a sequential technique characterised by persistence after initial refusal. This strategy proved more effective than single or repeated requests without reasoning, especially when urgency and mutual benefit were emphasised. Persistence, coupled with strategic adaptation, significantly improved compliance rates, though the authors cautioned against coercive overuse. The study expanded on established techniques such as the foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face methods, illustrating how message tailoring and situational responsiveness enhance compliance. This corresponds with Bevan et al.'s (2003) observation that individuals often adopt sequential strategies, employing multiple tactics in their efforts

to achieve reconciliation. Such a layered approach reflects the adaptability highlighted by Boster et al. (2009), where persuasive attempts are adjusted in response to previous interactions. These studies reveal that successful compliance is not merely a function of the strategy used, but also of the communicator's ability to modify and sequence those strategies dynamically.

Checton and Greene (2011) explored how university students seek stimulant medications without legitimate medical need. Applying Marwell and Schmitt (1967) typology, the study revealed a reliance on rational persuasion and direct requests, with justification grounded in academic pressure. Gender and prior experience influenced strategy choice where males preferred aggressive approaches, while females leaned toward emotional appeals. The findings raised ethical concerns, pointing to the normalisation of deception in student culture and the need for heightened physician awareness. Levesque and Li (2016) further examined compliance-gaining in healthcare, focusing on how male physicians influence patient behaviour. While direct orders were common, especially toward female patients, persuasive strategies that explained consequences were more positively received. However, motivational tactics failed to improve satisfaction, revealing a disconnect between intention and impact. Gender dynamics emerged as a critical factor, with implications for patient-centred care and ethical communication. These studies highlight the tensions inherent in health-related compliance. While persuasive efforts aim to promote well-being, they can also compromise autonomy and equity if not carefully managed. Ethical compliance-gaining requires not just effective communication, but also sensitivity to context, gender, and power dynamics.

Glass (2013) investigated a pedagogical model for teaching compliance-gaining to English language learners, integrating politeness theory and persuasion research. The model emphasised sequential strategies like the foot-in-the-door approach, which begins with small, manageable requests before escalating. Through role-playing and discourse completion tasks, learners were taught to structure their requests with cultural appropriateness, mitigation, and indirectness. This instructional approach is significant because it empowers learners with pragmatic competence, enabling them to navigate hierarchical and emotionally sensitive situations effectively. The gradual and non-confrontational nature of sequential strategies makes them particularly suited to English as a Second Language contexts, where cultural and linguistic barriers often complicate direct requests. By fostering both linguistic skill and social sensitivity, Glass's model exemplifies the ethical and adaptive potential of compliance-gaining education.

Nendauni and Sadiki (2019) analysed persuasive strategies in media coverage of the Vuwani demarcation disputes in South Africa, applying discourse analysis to newspaper texts. They found that political and community leaders used language not only to inform but to assert ideological positions, influence public opinion, and mobilise support. Strategies included emotional appeals, rhetorical questions, and appeals to authority. The use of inclusive or exclusive language further reinforced group identity and power dynamics. This study, rooted in the GPA model, emphasised the simultaneous pursuit of primary and secondary goals such as gaining support while avoiding backlash. It also highlighted how media discourse serves as a battleground for ideological contestation, where language functions as both a communicative and coercive tool. These findings demonstrate that compliance-gaining extends beyond interpersonal interactions into the broader socio-political sphere, where the stakes and implications are often much greater.

The reviewed scholarly literature reveals that compliance-gaining is a strategically adaptive, context-sensitive, and culturally situated phenomenon. It manifests across various domains, including interpersonal relationships, literature, education, healthcare, and political discourse. The strategies employed range from rational persuasion and emotional appeals to manipulation and coercion. Despite this breadth, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the discourse-pragmatic aspects of compliance-gaining strategies within Xitsonga literature. This study aims to address this gap by examining the use and communicative functions of such strategies in a Xitsonga literary text, thereby contributing to the broader scholarly discourse on compliance-gaining.

## **Research methodology**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the use and function of compliance-gaining strategies in Xitsonga literary text. This approach was deemed appropriate for its capacity to offer an in-depth exploration of linguistic and communicative phenomena as they occur within natural, cultural, and literary contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Mohajan, 2018). The primary aim was to examine how compliance-gaining strategies are embedded in Xitsonga narratives and how they reflect broader patterns of social and interpersonal interaction. The main source of data for the study was the Xitsonga drama book *Byi n'wi khele matluka* (2004)

by M. Malungana. This drama is about Pastor Jackson Pfumela, a respected church leader whose values collapse after being enticed by a criminal gang, The Holy Services. Lured with material rewards, he becomes involved in drug trafficking, leading to moral decay and widespread harm in his community. This literary work was purposefully selected for its rich narrative and detailed depiction of social relationships, which provided an ideal context for examining persuasive discourse and communicative intent. Selected passages and dialogues were identified based on their relevance to the study's objectives, particularly those instances where characters attempt to influence the beliefs, decisions, or behaviours of others. Data collection involved a close reading and textual analysis of the play to identify examples of compliance-gaining strategies. Relevant excerpts were extracted and organised for interpretation. The analysis was guided by thematic analysis, a qualitative approach well-suited for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within the data, allowing themes to emerge organically rather than fitting them into predetermined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2025). This approach allowed for the systematic coding of selected passages, the categorisation of observed strategies into thematic groups, and the interpretation of these themes within the framework of communication theory and Xitsonga cultural contexts. This methodological framework enabled a structured and culturally sensitive analysis of how language functions as a tool for persuasion in Xitsonga literature, highlighting the nuanced interplay between language, power, and social influence.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is informed by Compliance-Gaining Theory (CGT), a psychological framework developed by Robert Cialdini in 1984 and updated in 2021, which offers valuable insights into how individuals employ specific persuasive strategies to influence others and elicit behavioural change (Kiljan, 2023). At the heart of CGT are seven core principles of persuasion: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, unity, and scarcity (Cialdini 1984; Rodríguez, 2017; Hufen, 2024). These principles capture the psychological mechanisms through which compliance is often achieved in both interpersonal and social contexts (Alslaity & Tran, 2021; Muhanad et al., 2024). Robert Cialdini posits that these strategies function based on universal human tendencies and are frequently applied unconsciously, yet they profoundly shape decision-making and social behaviour (Cialdini, 2021; Mollazehi et al., 2024). As such, CGT provides a compelling lens for examining the subtle and overt forms of persuasion embedded within communication practices making it particularly relevant to literary analysis. In the context of this study, CGT is applied to explore persuasive dynamics in Xitsonga literature, which is deeply rooted in the values, traditions, and social structures of the Vatsonga people. The theory enables an analysis of how characters in literary texts use persuasion to influence others, secure cooperation, or achieve specific outcomes. For example, the principle of reciprocity may be examined in narratives that depict acts of generosity with implicit expectations of return. The concept of authority can be traced through portrayals of respect for elders, chiefs, and other traditional leaders, while social proof may emerge in depictions of characters conforming to communal norms or peer behaviour. Similarly, commitment and consistency can be explored through characters' participation in cultural rituals or through their personal development arcs, reflecting a drive for alignment between past actions and present choices. By applying CGT to Xitsonga texts, the study not only uncovers how persuasive strategies are woven into cultural storytelling but also highlights the broader communicative practices of the Vatsonga community.

### **Findings and discussion**

This section presents and analyses data from the selected Xitsonga literary text to investigate the use and function of compliance-gaining strategies. It explores how characters employ persuasive techniques to influence others, reflecting culturally embedded norms and communicative intentions.

#### ***Asserting Group Norms and Urgency***

Using group norms and urgency to refocus discussion is a compliance-gaining strategy that merges social influence with time-based pressure to steer a group toward a specific objective (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). This strategy involves three key components: reinforcing shared norms, politely interrupting and redirecting discourse, and introducing urgency through time constraints (Gass, 2009; Gächter et al., 2017; Gass & Seiter, 2022). These techniques are particularly effective in managing group dynamics within collaborative or culturally sensitive contexts, where authority is typically negotiated through mutual respect and shared goals rather than imposed hierarchically. In *Byi n'wi khele matluka*, the compliance-gaining strategy of asserting group norms and creating a sense of urgency is evident in Tshovansimbi's interaction with the other members of the Holy Service Crew. Tshovansimbi reminds the group of the specific purpose of their visit to Pastor Pfumela, who appears to divert

the conversation to matters unrelated to their proposal. The sole objective of the visit is to recruit Pastor Pfumela into their drug-trafficking operation. Emphasis is also placed on the need for secrecy, extending even to Pastor Pfumela's wife, Gavaza. This dynamic is exemplified in Excerpt 1 through Tshovansimbi's statement.

(1) Tshovansimbi: Ndzi kombela ku mi nghena enon'wini vakulukumba. Ndzi vona nkarhi wa karhi ku hi balekela, ha ha bula leti na letiya. A hi si nghena exivindzini xa mhaka leyi hi teleke yona. Hi tele timhaka ta xinuna, timhaka ta kona ti lava vavanuna ntsena [Can I please interject, gentlemen? Time is no longer on our side; we are just saying this and that. Let us get straight to the purpose of our visit. We came to discuss men's issues; these issues concern only men.] (*Byi n'wi khele matluka*, Malungana 2004:2).

In this passage, Tshovansimbi applies two key compliance-gaining techniques: reinforcing group norms and invoking urgency to shift the group's focus. By asserting, *Hi tele timhaka ta xinuna, timhaka ta kona ti lava vavanuna ntsena* (We came to discuss men's issues; these issues concern only men) the speaker reinforces a sense of in-group identity and solidarity. This appeal relies on normative influence by emphasising a shared gender identity and the expectation that discussion should remain relevant to the group's collective purpose. The repeated use of inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" invokes a sense of belonging and reestablishes boundaries around the appropriate subject matter issues relevant to men. This reflects Robert Cialdini's principle of social proof, which suggests that individuals are more likely to conform to behaviours or views endorsed by their social group (Hufen, 2024). By defining the appropriate content for discussion, the speaker signals group expectations and subtly pressures members to align accordingly. Moreover, the phrase: *Ndzi vona nkarhi wa karhi ku hi balekela, ha ha bula leti na letiya* (Time is no longer on our side; we are just saying this and that) introduces a sense of urgency, leveraging the perception of limited time to prompt immediate action. This rhetorical move reflects Robert Cialdini's scarcity principle, which holds that people are more likely to respond quickly or comply when time or resources are perceived as scarce (Isabella, 2022). The urgency serves to minimise distractions and guide the group back to the central agenda, framed as both time-sensitive and essential. This method reduces resistance by invoking concern over missed opportunities and emphasising the need for focused, efficient action.

### ***Appealing to fear and rational justification to reinforce group loyalty and silence***

This theme represents an influential compliance-gaining strategy used to regulate behaviour within a group. It relies heavily on fear, particularly the fear of external consequences such as punishment or danger to discourage individuals from straying from group norms (Wilson, 2016). Simultaneously, it incorporates rational justification, presenting certain actions or inactions as necessary and logically valid, thereby appealing to the audience's sense of reason. By emphasising group loyalty, this strategy establishes a clear in-group versus out-group divide, where compliance denotes trust and unity, while dissent is framed as disloyalty or betrayal. In *Byi n'wi khele matluka*, this strategy is evident in Madlayisani's response to Pastor Pfumela's concerns regarding the risks associated with their drug operation. At this stage, the syndicate's activities are under threat following the killing of one of its members, Masirheni, by the police. In response, Madlayisani reassures Pastor Pfumela by arguing that the group is now safer with Masirheni dead than when he was alive, as his excessive talk posed a significant risk to the operation. This rationale is clearly demonstrated in Excerpt 2.

(2) Madlayisani: E-e! A hi tiyiso sweswo, a hi le khombyeni. Masirheni u lo tivangela. Loko a pyopyiwile a famba a vulavula hi swona. Mina na n'wina hi tirha hi miyerile. Sweswi va nga n'wi dlaya swi kahle. Loko a vo ka va nga n'wi dlayangi, a hi ta ya ekhotsweni. A ta boxa mavito ya hina... [No! That is not true, we are not at risk. Masirheni invited his death. When he was drunk, he would go around and talk about it. Me and you, we work quietly. Now that they killed him it is good. If they did not kill him, all of us would go to prison. He would expose us.] (*Byi n'wi khele matluka*, Malungana 2004:48).

In this excerpt, Madlayisani seeks to legitimise Masirheni's death by portraying him as a liability to the group due to his indiscreet behaviour. The compliance-gaining strategies employed here rely on two interrelated persuasive techniques: fear appeal and rational justification, both of which align with Robert Cialdini's CGT. Through fear appeal, Madlayisani underscores the potential legal consequences of Masirheni's actions: *Loko a vo ka va nga n'wi dlayangi, a hi ta ya ekhotsweni* (If they did not kill him, all of us would go to prison). This statement functions as a deterrent against dissent, reinforcing group silence by associating disclosure with

severe repercussions. The underlying message is that self-preservation depends on discretion, while deviation from group norms invites danger and punishment. Simultaneously, Madlayisani employs rational justification by attributing responsibility for the death to Masirheni himself, stating that he “invited his death” through his drunken and reckless conduct. This rationalisation reframes the act of murder not as a moral transgression, but as a logical and necessary response to a threat from within. The speaker presents the killing as a justified act undertaken to safeguard the collective interest of the group, thereby reinforcing the norm of secrecy.

Moreover, the speaker constructs a clear dichotomy between “us” (those who act with caution and silence) and “him” (the reckless and dangerous outsider). In doing so, group loyalty is defined by one’s commitment to silence and the preservation of shared secrets. In this instance, compliance is achieved by invoking a shared sense of risk and the collective consequences of individual disobedience, effectively creating pressure to conform through emotional and social manipulation (Chory & Goodboy, 2010; Purdy, 2025). This excerpt exemplifies key principles of CGT, particularly the strategic use of fear, consistency, and social proof (Dlali & Mutsvairo, 2020; Harris, 2021). Fear functions as a deterrent; consistency is reinforced through appeals to group norms and past behaviour. Meanwhile, social proof is invoked through the consequences faced by Masirheni, whose actions are framed as a cautionary tale. Rather than relying on overt coercion, the strategy leverages psychological and social dynamics to secure compliance, illustrating the nuanced and often implicit mechanisms by which power operates within groups.

### ***Spiritual merit and possession as moral influence***

This theme explores how individuals perceived to possess spiritual authority such as pastors, prophets, and traditional healers are often endowed with moral legitimacy within their communities. As a compliance-gaining strategy, this authority draws on both spiritual credibility and material success to exert moral influence and social pressure (Blake, 2024). By attributing personal achievements or material wealth to divine favour or spiritual devotion, the spiritual leader implicitly establishes a behavioural model for others to emulate. This strategy appeals to admiration and aspiration: those who conform are viewed as spiritually aligned and deserving of similar blessings, while non-compliance may be interpreted as moral or spiritual deficiency (Best, 2000; Naragatti, 2025). In many African contexts, spiritual leaders often leverage their perceived divine favour to secure obedience, which followers interpret not merely as loyalty to a person but as reverence for a higher power (Gyekye, 1996). While this form of influence can inspire ethical conduct, it may also be manipulative when spiritual authority is used for personal or political advantage (Mwaura, 1999). It subtly shapes behaviour by associating faith, prayer, and obedience with success, thereby presenting compliance as both morally virtuous and materially rewarding. In *Byi n’wi khele matluka*, the compliance-gaining strategy of spiritual merit and material possession as moral influence is evident after Pastor Pfumela joins the criminal syndicate known as the Holy Service Crew, which is involved in drug trafficking. The syndicate rewards him with material goods, including a car, a mobile phone, and money. Subsequently, Pastor Pfumela misleads his congregation by preaching that his sudden material prosperity is the result of prayer and divine intervention, claiming that God has answered his prayers. This manipulation of spiritual authority is vividly illustrated in Pastor Pfumela’s address in Excerpt 3:

(3) Mufundhisi Pfumela: Loko mo ndzi languta kahle, mi ta swi vona leswaku ndzi ni riqingho leri vuriwaka ‘Cellular phone’. U nga kuma van’wana va n’wina va ndzi vondzokela. Ndzi lo khongela leswaku ndzi kuma riqingho leri. Loko u ri lava na wena riqingho leri, u fanele u boxa ehansi hi matsolo u khongela... [If you look at me well, you will see that I have a phone that is called Cellular phone. You find that some of you are jealous. I have prayed so that I can get this phone. If you also want it, you will have to kneel down and pray.] (*Byi n’wi khele matluka*, Malungana 2004:22).

The excerpt demonstrates the deliberate use of spiritual merit as a means to attain material possession, thereby exerting moral influence within a communal or religious context. Pastor Pfumela frames his acquisition of a cellular phone, a symbol of contemporary success and social desirability not as a product of chance or material privilege, but as a divine reward earned through prayer. In doing so, he positions himself as a spiritually worthy individual whose material success signifies divine approval. This approach functions as a subtle compliance-gaining strategy, designed to influence the attitudes and behaviours of others (Wilson, 2016). Rather than openly condemning envy, the speaker redirects it by implying that jealousy is misplaced and counterproductive. Instead, the audience is encouraged to replicate his spiritual discipline as a legitimate path to similar blessings. Thus, the

statement not only conveys personal accomplishment but also prescribes a moral and spiritual formula rooted in prayer and submission to divine will as the prerequisite for achieving material rewards. This tactic aligns with Robert Cialdini's CGT, particularly the principles of authority, social proof, scarcity, and consistency (Mollazehi et al., 2024). By appealing to these psychological triggers, the speaker effectively shapes behaviour through emotional and spiritual reasoning rather than direct coercion. The excerpt thus illustrates how spiritual legitimacy can be strategically employed to exert social influence, encouraging conformity and behavioural alignment through the promise of moral and material elevation.

### ***Glorifying wealth as a source of power, unity, and social value***

This theme examines how material wealth is framed as a symbol of success, influence, and social prestige. In many communities, individuals with financial resources are revered and imitated, often without questioning the ethical foundations of their affluence (Archer & Matheson, 2021). Wealth, in this sense, becomes a form of both social and moral capital, legitimising authority and casting the affluent as models to aspire to (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). As a compliance-gaining strategy, the elevation of wealth links financial success with personal virtue and collective well-being. According to Borrero et al. (2013), wealth is not simply seen as an individual asset but as a shared ideal crucial for happiness, survival, and social inclusion. By assigning symbolic power to money, this approach encourages conformity and admiration, while potentially masking underlying moral issues. In effect, it fosters unity around a common aspiration, reinforcing power structures and guiding behaviour. In *Byi n'wi khele matluka*, the strategy of glorifying wealth as a source of power, cohesion, and social value is evident in the visit paid by a criminal syndicate to Pastor Pfumela, whom they attempt to recruit into their drug-trafficking enterprise. The group seeks to exploit his respected social position by using him as an importer, believing that his status would attract minimal suspicion. During this encounter, Tshovansimbi, one of the syndicate members, outlines the operational plan, clarifies the role Pastor Pfumela is expected to play, and highlights the financial benefits he would derive from the venture. This approach is exemplified in Tshovansimbi's dialogue with Pastor Pfumela in Excerpt 4.

(4) Tshovansimbi: Hi ni mbhovo wa mali, hi vone swi antswa ku phemelana na n'wina xinkwa, Vatsonga va ri: Vana va munhu va xekelana nhloko ya njiya. Ha swi tiva leswaku ku hava na munhu na un'we loyi a vengaka mali. Phela mali i vutomi, Mali i xihlovo xa ntsako, loko munhu a nga ri na mali. U hundzuka xivuluvulu laha misaveni. Ma swi lava ku kelela mali ke? I ku noneriwa hi mpfundla mufundhisi [I am the path to wealth; that is why we find it necessary to share this bread with you. As the Vatsonga say: 'Children share even the head of a locust.' We all know that no one despises money, money is life, the source of happiness. Without it, a person becomes insignificant, like a tadpole in this world. Do you want more money? Well, catching a fat rabbit is rare.] (*Byi n'wi khele matluka*, Malungana 2004: 3).

In this excerpt, Tshovansimbi employs culturally resonant expressions and metaphors to elevate the status of money, presenting it not merely as a means of survival but as the very essence of life. The statement *Hi ni mbhovo wa mali, hi vone swi antswa ku phemelana na n'wina xinkwa* (We are the path to wealth; that is why we find it necessary to share this bread with you) positions the speaker as both an authority figure and a benefactor. This framing not only portrays the speaker as the gateway to prosperity but also fosters a sense of communal unity and mutual benefit, while subtly reinforcing a hierarchy in which the speaker controls access to desired resources namely, wealth and power. The proverb *Vana va munhu va xekelana nhloko ya njiya* (Children share even the head of a locust) evokes a strong ethic of solidarity in scarcity, emphasising that even limited resources, when shared, foster social cohesion. This sentiment enhances the speaker's credibility by aligning his message with communal values, thereby portraying the sharing of wealth as a noble and virtuous act. Additionally, the metaphor *U hundzuka xivuluvulu laha misaveni* (Without money, a person becomes a tadpole in this world) highlights the insignificance and vulnerability of poverty, dramatising the necessity of financial success. This imagery underscores the notion that without money, one is socially irrelevant and thus reinforces the idea that material wealth is a prerequisite for social recognition and status. This excerpt exemplifies several of Cialdini's principles of persuasion, particularly authority, social proof, liking, scarcity, and consistency (Alslaity & Tran, 2021; Kiljan, 2023). The glorification of wealth operates as a compliance-gaining strategy, blending emotional appeal with cultural references and authoritative positioning. It presents wealth not only as personal achievement but as a collective cultural aspiration, using familiar proverbs and symbolic language to evoke trust, admiration, and a desire to conform. Viewed through the lens of Robert Cialdini's theory, the speaker's rhetoric becomes

a strategic tool for shaping attitudes and behaviours through persuasive social cues, cultural legitimacy, and symbolic power.

### ***Polite appeal and blessing for prompt compliance***

The theme encapsulates a compliance-gaining strategy grounded in politeness, humility, and the invocation of goodwill to encourage cooperation. It employs courteous language, indirect requests, and affirming gestures such as blessings or well-wishes to make persuasion feel gentle and agreeable (Rosalina, 2024). Instead of issuing demands or exerting pressure, the speaker takes on a respectful and humble tone that appeals to the listener's empathy, cultural expectations, or moral duty. Zhang (2019) noted that politeness fosters a safe and respectful communicative space where requests are perceived as considerate and justifiable. The inclusion of blessings or kind expressions frames the act of compliance as mutually beneficial, offering both social and spiritual reward to the recipient (Boster et al., 2009). According to Roffey (2016), such positive reinforcement can evoke a sense of psychological reciprocity, prompting the listener to respond favourably out of gratitude or shared values. This approach strengthens persuasive impact by situating the appeal within a familiar cultural and emotional context, transforming compliance into an act of shared goodwill. In *Byi n'wi khele matluka*, the compliance-gaining strategy of polite appeal accompanied by a blessing for prompt compliance is evident after the Holy Service Crew, through Tshovansimbi, presents Pastor Pfumela with their plan to generate wealth through drug trafficking. Rather than exerting immediate pressure, Tshovansimbi allows Pastor Pfumela time to reflect on the proposal while expressing an expectation of a favourable response within a reasonable timeframe. This persuasive approach is effectively illustrated in Excerpt 5, where Tshovansimbi addresses Pastor Pfumela with courtesy and subtle encouragement.

(5) Tshovansimbi: Hi nga khensa loko nhlamulo ya n'wina leyo saseka hi yi kuma yi tshamisekile hi Ravuntlhanu. Onge Xikwembu xi nga mi rindza bya mbhaha loko wu rindza swiciwana. [We would greatly appreciate it if we could receive your kind response by Friday. May God protect you as tenderly as a hen protects her chicks.] (*Byi n'wi khele matluka*, Malungana 2004:5).

The excerpt illustrates a compliance-gaining strategy grounded in courtesy, humility, and positive emotional appeal, aligning with the theme of "polite appeal and blessing for prompt compliance". Tshovansimbi addresses Pastor Pfumela in a respectful and non-threatening manner, stating: *Hi nga khensa loko nhlamulo ya n'wina leyo saseka hi yi kuma yi tshamisekile hi Ravuntlhanu* (We would greatly appreciate it if we could receive your kind response by Friday). This polite and indirect phrasing softens the request, avoiding coercion and instead appealing to the recipient's sense of empathy and social responsibility. By using considerate language, Tshovansimbi reduces potential resistance and positions the request as reasonable and respectful. Furthermore, the phrase *Onge Xikwembu xi nga mi rindza bya mbhaha loko wu rindza swiciwana* (May God protect you as tenderly as a hen protects her chicks) introduces a spiritual blessing, adding emotional warmth and goodwill to the interaction. This expression not only enhances the speaker's likability but also embeds the request within a moral and culturally resonant framework. It elevates the appeal beyond personal gain, framing compliance as a reciprocal and virtuous act. This strategy aligns with several of Robert Cialdini's principles of persuasion, including liking, reciprocity, authority, consistency, and social proof (Rubin et al., 2020). By blending politeness with spiritual affirmation, Tshovansimbi crafts a persuasive approach that motivates cooperation through shared values and emotional resonance. As such, the excerpt demonstrates how culturally sensitive and emotionally intelligent communication can serve as a powerful tool for eliciting compliance while reinforcing social harmony and mutual respect.

### **Conclusion**

The study reveals that *Byi n'wi khele matluka* by M. Malungana offers a rich portrayal of the nuanced use of compliance-gaining strategies within Xitsonga discourse, reflecting broader socio-cultural dynamics and underlying power relations. Through its characters and dialogue, the text illustrates how influence is exerted through culturally embedded norms and rhetorical strategies that appeal to group identity, fear, logic, spirituality, and economic ambition. The analysis identifies five dominant strategies: reinforcing group norms and urgency, invoking fear and rational justifications, drawing on spiritual authority and religious merit, glorifying wealth, and employing politeness and blessings to encourage prompt compliance. These strategies function not only as rhetorical techniques but also as culturally grounded tools reflecting the community's worldview and communicative values. Characters such as Tshovansimbi and Madlayisani employ normative and urgency-based appeals

to uphold group focus and discipline. Similarly, fear-based and rational appeals are used to promote secrecy and loyalty, demonstrating how emotional influence and logical reasoning can jointly drive compliance. Pastor Pfumela's spiritual authority exemplifies the persuasive power of religious discourse, using moral and theological narratives to command obedience and portray material prosperity as a divine reward for spiritual conformity. Wealth emerges as a symbol of power and unity, reinforcing social hierarchies and shared aspirations. Additionally, the use of courteous and respectful language helps to reduce resistance, framing requests as considerate and legitimate. These strategies illuminate how power, morality, and social cohesion are negotiated through persuasive communication within the Xitsonga cultural context. The findings underscore the intricate relationship between language, power, and culture in Xitsonga communication, aligning with Robert Cialdini's CGT, particularly the principles of authority, social proof, scarcity, fear, and consistency. This study thus enhances our understanding of how African literature reflects and reproduces traditional and contemporary mechanisms of social influence and control.

## Declarations

**Interdisciplinary Scope:** This study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on linguistics, pragmatics, social psychology, literary studies, and cultural anthropology to investigate compliance-gaining strategies in a Xitsonga literary text. From a linguistic standpoint, it examines persuasive discourse and pragmatic strategies within dialogue, while social psychology, particularly Cialdini's Compliance-Gaining Theory, offers a framework for understanding processes of influence, persuasion, and group dynamics. Literary studies contribute insights into characterisation, narrative context, and thematic development, whereas cultural anthropology foregrounds indigenous norms, spiritual beliefs, and communal values that shape communicative practices in the text. Through the integration of these disciplines, the study demonstrates how language operates as a social, psychological, and cultural resource for negotiating power, morality, and social cohesion.

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