

## **LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A POSITIVE IDENTITY AMONG INMATES IN KENYAN JAILS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper describes linguistic and stylistic strategies used by a group of inmates in Kenyan jails to construct their identities in a positive way through language. They did so in thirty-four letters which they wrote to a religious leader who was their benefactor. Linguistically, the strategy consisted mainly in using euphemistic vocabulary and passive and active voice constructions that avoided presenting the inmates directly as the wrongdoers now serving a jail sentence. Stylistically, the inmates resorted to two main strategies: describing their skills and the positive aspects of their lives before they were imprisoned and choosing to use a religious register which would be associated with their addressee. Apparently, they resorted to those linguistic and stylistic strategies in an attempt to distance themselves from the crimes they had committed