

Kindly as a polite request mitigator and more in Kenyan English usage: Evidence of its syntactic and pragmatic versatility

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Abstract

The adverb *kindly* is little used as a polite request mitigator (*Kindly close the door*) in World Standard English (WSE). But it is a frequent occurrence in Kenyan English (KenE), where, unlike in WSE, it is not limited to a pre-verbal position: it can occur even without an accompanying verb whose illocutionary force it is supposed to mitigate, as in *Kindly, I'm appealing to you* and *I'm appealing to you, kindly*. Still unlike in WSE, *kindly* freely co-occurs with *please* (the other request mitigator), as in *Kindly please listen to me* or *Please kindly listen to me*. Also, *kindly* frequently premodifies the verb *request*, as in *I'm kindly requesting you to listen to me*. These various positions and pragmatic configurations in which *kindly* occurs in KenE are evidence of its syntactic and pragmatic versatility, as illustrated by the 105 SMS, WhatsApp and email messages used as data in this article.

Key words: Kenyan English, kindly, polite requests, mitigate, illocutionary force

1. Introduction

The adverb *kindly* discussed in this paper is that meant to be a polite request mitigator, not the one meaning 'in a kind manner'. Its "syntactic versatility" lies in the fact that it occurs in more syntactic positions in Kenyan English (KenE) than in World Standard English (WSE), while its "pragmatic versatility" means that it in effect serves more than just as the 'request mitigator' it should be expected to mean in WSE. The syntactic versatility of *kindly* can be illustrated with example (1) taken from the authors' collection of data:

- (1) *Can it be possible for you to recommend [me] today, kindly.*

(4th year student, S.O., 25 Oct. 2021)

In (1) *kindly* was used sentence-finally, a position in which it is not expected in WSE, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 570). For its part, the "pragmatic versatility" of *kindly* can be illustrated with (2):

- (2) *Kindly, I indicated, I don't know whether my exam was saved.*

(2nd year student, S.J.M., 23 Sept. 2022)

In (2) *kindly* is not attached to a specific verb whose illocutionary force it is supposed to mitigate. So, one may wonder what specific request it is the student was addressing to her lecturer for the latter to do (for her), if with requests you “ask your hearer whether he or she is willing or able to do something” (Leech & Svartvik 2002: 175). The absence of the specific request to be mitigated allows for more than one interpretation of that sentence.

The suggestion that sentences (1) and (2) are not expected in WSE automatically suggests that *kindly* as a polite request mitigator is more frequent in KenE than in WSE. This can indeed be inferred from words from the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2020, 10th edn.) which refer to *kindly* as being “old-fashioned” and “formal.” That *kindly* is old-fashioned is also signalled by the total absence of it in the structures in (3) below, given by Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 863) to illustrate requests:

- (3) [a] *Can/Could you (please) open the window.*
[b] *Will/Would you (please) open the window.*
[c] *Would you be good enough to open the window (please).*
[d] *Would you mind opening the window (please)?*
[e] *Would you like to open the window (please)?*
[f] *I wonder if I might trouble you to open the window?*

The authors later show that imperatives can be used as directives, among which are requests, and give *Kindly lower your voices* as one of the examples (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 929-930). But, quite relevantly, they specify that this *kindly* is used “less frequently” than *please* (p. 930). And so do Quirk et al. (1985: 832), who write: “*Please* and (to a lesser extent) *kindly* may be added to imperative sentences with the illocutionary force of a request to convey greater overt politeness”. That *kindly* is indeed extremely rare in WSE as a request mitigator is further signalled by the total absence of it from Levinson (1983), a book with a full chapter on speech acts. (*Please* is mentioned 49 times in it.) Finally, an even stronger indication of the quasi-absence of *kindly*, at least in spoken British English, lies in the following footnote from Leech (2014: 174): “In the ten-million-word spoken subcorpus of the [British National Corpus], there are only four instances of the adverb *kindly* in requests, and two of them are identically sarcastic: *Will you kindly shut up!*”.

It transpires from the paragraphs above that while *kindly*, typically in imperative structures, can be used to express polite requests in WSE, it is far from being the preferred option. Yet, it looks so pervasive in Kenyan English usage that it is evidently a very popular option today, especially in certain genres like SMSs, WhatsApp messages and emails. The word *today* is relevant because Buregeya (2019: 187) reports that in the Kenyan component of the *International Corpus of English*, compiled three decades ago, the adverb *kindly* used in the sense of *please* to mitigate a polite request in an imperative construction like ***Kindly open the door for me*** occurs, in written English, about twice as less frequently as its counterpart *please* (***Please open the door for me***): 20 times for the latter against only 9 times for the former (see Buregeya, 2019: 187, Table 6.1). Elsewhere, Buregeya (2004: 114) reports that the *kindly* + imperative structure (e.g. *Kindly open the door for me*) represented only 11% of the request structures collected for the study, against 25 % for the competing structure *Please* + imperative (*Please open the door for me*). On the other hand, though, Buregeya (2019: 186) reports much closer statistics: 16% for the structure *Kindly* + imperative against 18% for the structure *Please* + imperative. So, it seems that in KenE usage *kindly* is a serious competitor of *please* in terms of mitigating polite requests (if it has not overtaken it already) and, thus, is far from being “old-fashioned”.

The data collected for this study suggest that the rising frequency of *kindly* in KenE usage has come with a wider range of meanings as well, because in addition to its being used before the request verb it is meant to mitigate, in many cases it is also used combined with *please*, while in some others it is used even without the verb whose illocutionary force it is supposed to mitigate. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that because of its various syntactic positions and its different pragmatic combinations, what *kindly* mitigates in KenE may be mostly requests, but at other times it is a range of speech acts such as information-seeking. And in some other cases what it mitigates is simply indeterminate. The paper is based on authentic data, in the form of SMSs, WhatsApp messages and emails which were addressed to the authors by their university students, their colleagues and casual acquaintances from 2015 to 2023. These messages were not elicited by the authors. In this paper they appear in their original form; any change to the original is indicated between square brackets.

2. Data from SMS, WhatsApp and email messages

The data presented below first illustrate the syntactic versatility of *kindly* and then its pragmatic versatility.

2.1 The syntactic versatility of *kindly*

This kind of versatility is manifested in its occurrence in three syntactic positions: sentence-initially, sentence-medially and sentence-finally.

2.1.1 The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-initially

The pattern illustrated by the examples in Table 1 in which *kindly* appears at the beginning of a sentence turns out to be the *kindly* + imperative pattern, which, as noted in the Introduction, is also the one that is expected in WSE.

Table 1: The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-initially

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(4)	<i>Kindly if you could help me include or forward my name kindly.</i> (4th year student A.C., 15 Sept. 2022)	Request
(5)	<i>Kindly Sir, I'd really appreciate if you'd look into it.</i> (3rd year student N.M.E, 5 Dec. 2023)	Request
(6)	<i>Kindly get back to me as soon as possible and advise me on the way forward.</i> (3rd year student B.W., 14 Sept. 2022)	Request
(7)	<i>Kindly tell me the way forward.</i> (2nd year student T.G., 14 May 2022)	Request
(8)	<i>Kindly process for that student.</i> (University lecturer F.A., 16 Nov. 2023)	Request
(9)	<i>Kindly help as per attached.</i> (University lecturer K.F., 22 May 2021)	Request
(10)	<i>Kindly correct the following.</i>	Request

- (University lecturer J.M., 6 Sept. 2023)
- (11) *Kindly help me with your email address so that I send you my questionnaire.* Request
- (M.A. Student E.M., 23 Dec. 2015).
- (12) *Kindly share the above.* Request
- (Acquaintance, L.W., 21 Dec. 2023)
- (13) *Kindly let me know if you will be able to attend.* Information-seeking
- (University lecturer R.K., 22 Feb. 2021)
- (14) *Kindly find the link to the exam scripts as per the request.* Information-giving
- (University of Nairobi [UoN] ICT official B.N., 26 May 2023)
- (15) *Kindly find the attached.* Information-giving
- (University lecturer J.N., 18 Jan. 2023)
- (16) *Kindly receive the timetable for your information and further action.* Information-giving]
- (University lecturer I.K., 12 Aug. 2023)
- (17) *Kindly see the attached notice for sale of seedlings.* Information-giving
- (University lecturer D.M., 19 Jul. 2021)
- (18) *Kindly receive the letter.* Information-giving
- (3rd year student V.M., 01 Aug. 2023)
- (19) *Kindly the members herein who wish to attend the [...] funeral, join using the link and register by 4pm for planning and logistics purposes.* Suggestion
- (University lecturer D.G., 21 Sept. 2022).
- (20) *Kindly channel your financial support to help the family [...].* Suggestion
- (University lecturer E.G., 23 Nov. 2023)
- (21) *Kindly leave these people alone. This is typical of majority of Kenyan politicians.* Suggestion
- (University lecturer P.O., 10 Sept. 2022)
- (22) *Kindly nominate someone please.* Suggestion
- (University lecturer D.G., 25 Aug. 2022)
- (23) *Kindly feel free to engage further.* Suggestion
- (University lecturer D.G., 18 Jan. 2023)
- (24) *Kindly receive my apologies.* Pleading

- (3rd year student, S.K., 22 Jul. 2021).
- (25) *Kindly channel in your generous contributions.* Pleading
(Acquaintance G.M., 21 Dec. 2023)
- (26) *Kindly register for the course at the link below.* Instructions
(UoN Corporate Affairs Director, 28 Sept. 2022)
- (27) *Kindly hurry up.* Order
(4th year student B.O., 11 May 2022)
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2.1.2 The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-medially

The term *medially* is used to cover all instances where *kindly* does not appear as the very first word or the very last one in a sentence, not just the exact middle.

Table 2: The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-medially

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(28)	<i>I am sorry for disturbing you but kindly I need your help.</i> (4th year student S.W., 08 Oct. 2021)	Request
(29)	<i>I would like you to kindly advise me on the same please.</i> (2nd year student R.N., 10 Nov. 2023)	Request
(30)	<i>I kindly need your assistance.</i> (2nd year student C.R., 03 Mar. 2023)	Request
(31)	<i>I was humbly [asking] if you could kindly help in retrieving the exam links and forwarding the same please.</i> (3rd year student G.M., 01 Sept. 2023)	Request
(32)	<i>That is why I am requesting that you kindly recommend me once more Dr.</i> (4th year student P. O., 05 Sept. 2023)	Request
(33)	<i>Can you kindly call her and ask her if there's any way I may be helped out or should I wait till next week?</i> (4th year student L.O., 16 Oct. 2022)	Request
(34)	<i>I beg of you madam, kindly assign another TLE 203 CAT that I may have an opportunity to sit it [...].</i>	Request

- (2nd year student, no name, 08 Dec. 2021)
- (35) *No password for the meeting, **kindly** send to allow me join the meeting.* Request
- (University lecturer A.N., 22 Nov. 2023)
- (36) *Anyone who knows the seller, **kindly** inbox me.* Request
- (Acquaintance H.O., 09 Jan. 2022)
- (37) *Hello madam I re-forwarded again the assignment in your email **kindly** check on it.* Request
- (3rd year student B.L., 02 Jan. 2022)
- (38) *If you were to send and forgot, **kindly** the fundraising is ongoing and there is room to send me your contribution.* Information-giving
- (University lecturer N.G., 11 Nov. 2023)
- (39) *He advised me that if I am a student at UoN, I may start Swedish classes, **kindly** I am not.* Information-giving
- (2nd year student, no name, 06 Oct. 2023)
- (40) *Morning Prof. **Kindly** let me send by Monday.* Permission-seeking
- (M.A. student C.M., 28 Mar. 2019).
- (41) *I plead for your understanding Daktari [Dr], **kindly** help madam.* Pleading
- (2nd year student, no name, 08 Dec. 2021)
- (42) *[...] I'm one of you **kindly**, please reason with me, some will be engaged in other activities like hustles etc.* Pleading
- (1st year student, no name, 06 May 2021)
- (43) *While at it, **kindly** vote for me as Chapter Assistant Secretary [...]* Pleading
- (University lecturer, D.E., 17 Jun. 2021)
- (44) *If you have inquiries, you may **kindly** contact Prof. [I.C.]* Advice
- (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research, 24 Feb. 2023)
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2.1.3 The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-finallyTable 3: The occurrence of *kindly* sentence-finally

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(45)	<i>[...] is there any chance you can inform me kindly.</i> (3rd year student B.W.K., 7 Sept. 2021)	Request
(46)	<i>I was requesting that you give me the TLT 103 CAT, kindly.</i> (1st year student C.N., 16 Jul. 2021)	Request
(47)	<i>Good morning daktari [Dr], we have a problem, you need to intervene to help us kindly.</i> (4th year student G.O., 30 Apr. 2021)	Request
(48)	<i>If you could check it for me kindly.</i> (2nd year student B.W., 03 Sept. 2021)	Request
(49)	<i>Who should I contact to get help kindly?</i> (3rd year student B.K., 16 Sept. 2021)	Information-seeking
(50)	<i>What might be the problem for this and how can I get help to address this, kindly?</i> (4th year student M.N., 26 Sept. 2022)	Information-seeking
(51)	<i>Hello. I am told there was a TLE 202 [CAT] [...] I was not aware, how can I do it kindly?</i> (2nd year student, no name, 30 Jul. 2021)	Information-seeking
(52)	<i>If you didn't get tea, please go out and take tea and snacks kindly.</i> (Acquaintance A.N., 11 Nov. 2023)	Advice
(53)	<i>So try working on it before Thursday or Friday kindly.</i> (4th year student J.S., 19 Jul. 2021)	Advice
(54)	<i>Daktari [Dr.] I will send you a sanitizer. Accept it kindly.</i> (4th year student R.M., 28 Jul. 2021)	Entreaty
(55)	<i>Someone to re-paste the link kindly.</i> (2nd year student M.O., 04 Jan. 2022)	Wish
(56)	<i>[...] would you mind to be my recommender kindly?</i> (4th year student S.O., 18 Oct. 2021)	Pleading

(57)	<i>My apologies kindly.</i>	Wish (3rd year student G.K., 18 Oct. 2023)
(58)	<i>I have a flight to catch at 4, can we do 1-3 kindly.</i>	Suggestion (4th year student V.K., 11 Nov. 2021)
(59)	<i>Drafted timetable for lit major @anybody kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (Undergraduate student, no name, 18 Oct. 2021)
(60)	<i>Good afternoon, I will not be able to attend the meeting kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (University lecturer C. N., 01 Oct. 2021)
(61)	<i>Good morning Doctor, I didn't get a solution to this kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (4th year student H. K., 19 Sept. 2022)
(62)	<i>I will be taking the special exams from 19th this month kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (2nd year student J.S., 06 Jul. 2022)
(63)	<i>Let me walk to the dean's office and find out what the issue is, kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (Faculty of Arts Registrar, 10 Feb. 2023).
(64)	<i>Good evening Prof. Sorry I missed your call. [...] I'm travelling. Will call tomorrow kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (University lecturer S.K.N., 15 Dec. 2023)
(65)	<i>Yeah kindly.</i>	Indeterminate (4th year student P.A., 01 Nov. 2023)

2.2 The pragmatic versatility of *kindly*

There are four aspects of *kindly*'s pragmatic versatility: first, as expected of a polite request mitigator, it is used with the verb expressing request itself, in a *kindly* + imperative + verb structure, which is the case of the sentences in Sub-section 2.1.1, where *kindly* appears sentence-initially. Second, it is used in conjunction with *please*, the other polite request mitigator, whether it appears before it or after it. Third, it directly premodifies the verb *request* itself. Fourth, it is used alone (as in ***Kindly***, *the door is closed*). With the first case being already illustrated in Table 1, tables 4-7 will illustrate the other three cases.

2.2.1 The occurrence of *kindly* before *please*Table 4: The occurrence of *kindly* before *please*

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(66)	<i>Kindly please help me am stranded.</i> (3rd year student, V.O., 11 Sept. 2023)	Request
(67)	<i>Kindly please, am much ready to sit for their CATs anytime or if it's possible, allow me sit the supplementary.</i> (4th year Student V.N., 4 Aug.2023)	Request
(68)	<i>Kindly, please help me out so that I will graduate this coming September.</i> (4th year student A.M., 18 Aug. 2021)	Request
(69)	<i>Gosh can you ask for me kindly please.</i> (3rd year student E.A., 09 Aug.2023)	Request
(70)	<i>Kindly please click to view the advertised units on their website.</i> (UoN Corporate Affairs Director, 21 Jun. 2021)	Suggestion
(71)	<i>I need to finish paying up my fee kindly please.</i> (4th year student E.K., 28 Dec. 2021)	Indeterminate

2.2.2 The occurrence of *kindly* after *please*Table 5: The occurrence of *kindly* after *please*

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(72)	<i>Plz kindly save me with 1,000.</i> (1st year student C.O., 06 Sept. 2022)	Request
(73)	<i>Please kindly madam I'm requesting from you, if the exam could be reviewed even for an hour so that I can complete it.</i> (2nd year student F.G., 11 Nov. 2021)	Request

- (74) *Please kindly share this video to reach all our farmers who use roundup weedkiller to control weeds in their farms.* Request
(University lecturer, J.O., 06 Mar. 2023)
- (75) *Please kindly elaborate to us all your above good suggestions.* Request
(Acquaintance S.P., 12 Oct. 2023)
- (76) *Please kindly send your contributions [for shopping] to enable me know how to divide the monies.* Request
(Acquaintance B.O., 23 Sept. 2023)
- (77) *If there's anything you can please kindly help.* Request
(4th year student A.H., 11 Sept. 2023)
- (78) *I had a network problem the whole of last semester please kindly put me into consideration.* Request
(3rd year student C.O., 16 Mar. 2023)
- (79) *Please, kindly inform all the eligible students.* Request
(Dean, Faculty of Education, 04 Nov. 2021)
- (80) *Please, kindly take note.* Advice
(Dean, Faculty of Education, 4 Nov. 2021)
- (81) *Please kindly keep [her] in your prayers coz she is still mourning.* Pleading
(University lecturer Z.K., 02 Oct. 2023).
- (82) *For the avoidance of any further doubt, I am requesting you to please kindly refer to my point No.2 in my initial message [...]* Advice
(University lecturer H.S., 19 May 2021)
- (83) *Please kindly receive the senate approved BEd (Arts) syllabus for purposes of implementation of resolution number (v).* Information-giving
(University lecturer S.G., 14 Sept. 2023)
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2.2.3 The co-occurrence of *kindly* with the verb *request*Table 6: The co-occurrence of *kindly* with the verb *request*

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(84)	<i>I Kindly request for your mercy and consideration. Please mark my work and give me marks.</i> (2nd year student L.M., 14 July 2020)	Request
(85)	<i>Hi Dr B., This is your student [P.] MA 2013. I kindly request you to correct for me the following statement [...].</i> (Former MA student N.P., 16 Feb. 2016).	Request
(86)	<i>... I'm kindly requesting to have you as one of my referee.</i> (4th year student J.N., 05 Oct. 2021)	Request
(87)	<i>Hope you are doing well Dakтари [Dr]. I kindly request for your email address.</i> (MA 1 student J.A., 24 Dec. 2015).	Request
(88)	<i>I would kindly request for your intervention to have a supplementary [exam].</i> (2nd year student S.O., 29 Nov. 2021)	Request
(89)	<i>I kindly request for your help in resolving this matter as soon as possible.</i> (4th year student J.M., 09 Aug. 2023)	Request
(90)	<i>[...] and I wanted to request kindly if it is possible for you to get a marksheet with my mark on it ...</i> (4th year student P.N., 08 Sept. 2021)	Request
(91)	<i>[...] and I kindly request that you share your CV to assist us in this process.</i> (Acquaintance M.C., 03 Apr. 2022)	Request
(92)	<i>I hope you are doing well a'm kindly requesting you to send us notes ...</i> (1st year student, no name, 17 Oct. 2023)	Request

2.2.4 The occurrence of *kindly* without mitigating any visible verbTable 7: The occurrence of *kindly* without mitigating any visible verb

	SMS/WhatsApp/Email message as mitigated by <i>kindly</i>	Its illocutionary force
(93)	<i>Kindly which day is the visit?</i> (Acquaintance S.W., 04 Sep. 2023)	Information-seeking
(94)	<i>Kindly teens will join main service.</i> (Acquaintance G.N., 29 Jul. 2023)	Information-giving
(95)	<i>Kindly, I will do so tomorrow.</i> (PhD student M.M., 13 Jul. 2022)	Information-giving
(96)	<i>Prof, kindly I have not received my marks for the following courses: CLC411 and CLC413.</i> (4th year student R.O., 21 Aug. 2023)	Information-giving
(97)	<i>Kindly 18th if possible.</i> (Acquaintance M.K., 04 Jun. 2023)	Suggestion
(98)	<i>Kindly, may we hear our brothers and sisters who teach religious studies ... more so Dakitari [Dr.] H.</i> (University lecturer B.M., 27 Dec. 2021)	Advice
(99)	<i>Kindly I was told I didn't do a CAT accompanying the unit [...]</i> (2nd year student S.J.M., 23 Sept. 2022)	Indeterminate
(100)	<i>Kindly what will become of me?</i> (3rd year student L.E., 12 Feb. 2023)	Indeterminate

3. Discussion

3.1 Meanings of *kindly* in the different linguistic contexts across the 7 tables

Three meanings can be assigned to *kindly* across the 100 examples in the 7 tables:

- kindly* as real mitigator not only of polite requests but also of other speech acts,
- kindly* as an intensifier of either *please* or the verb *request* as the real request mitigators, and
- kindly* as a mere phatic expression.

As indicated in the rightmost column of each of the 7 tables, the statements (illocutionary acts) which the adverb *kindly* was used to mitigate are not all polite requests. They are not if we refer to the simple definition of a request as something you want the hearer to do, definition encapsulated by this statement: “If you request someone to do something, you politely or formally ask them to do it” (*Collins English Dictionary Online*). Going by this definition, a statement like *Kindly correct the following* (example 10) is clearly a request, while *He advised me that if I am a student at UoN, I may start Swedish classes, kindly I am not* (example 39) is certainly not; it is an information-giving statement. And as the different tables show, while many of the statements they contain can be interpreted as indeed being requests, others perform a variety of other functions: seeking information (as in 51), giving information (as in 38), giving advice (as in 53), making a suggestion (as in 58), expressing a pleading (as in 81), expressing a wish (as in 55), seeking permission (as in 40), giving instructions (as in 26), and giving an order (as in 27). What they have in common is that they are all mitigated by *kindly*.

However, it can be argued that *kindly* does not have the same “mitigating force” in all those statements: it is strong in some pragmatic configurations, like those in table 1 where it is just alone before a verb, while it is weak in others. This latter case concerns two instances. The first one refers to those statements where *kindly* is used just as an intensifier of *please* (in Table 4) or of the verb *request* (in table 6), both of which are its competitors in terms of mitigating polite requests in KenE usage.¹ Calling *kindly* an intensifier is based on the twin-argument that both *kindly* and *please* are considered (e.g. by the *Collins English Dictionary Online*) as adverbs (when they mitigate requests) and that intensifying adverbs precede the intensified ones (like *almost* in *almost certainly*; see Biber et al. 1999: 546). However, only the authors of the *kindly-please* sequence could tell (if they would be able to) if they really meant *kindly* to be just an intensifier. For example, that is not probably the case for the author of (68), who separated *kindly* from *please* with a comma.

¹ In WSE the verb *request* is not used to make polite requests. It is used to pass information or give orders, as in *Students are requested to report on time*. Using it in KenE to make a genuine polite request is proof that “although people must be polite everywhere they need not necessarily be polite in the same way [...]” Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015: 260).

The second pragmatic configuration where *kindly* is weak is where it seems to function as a mere phatic expression, used by the addresser “to establish and maintain good social relations” (with the addressee) “without necessarily communicating any information” (Trudgill 2003: 102-103). Examples of traditional phatic remarks are comments about the weather and greetings like *How are you?*, goodbye comments like *Have a good day*, and congratulatory remarks like *Glad to see you* (Leech 2014: 204). The *kindly* used in examples in tables 3 and 7 resembles phatic expressions in three respects - still using Leech’s (2014) terminology: a) it is used in the “opening and closing” of the intended message; b) it will be “felt to be virtually empty of feeling”; c) it can, like them, be considered a “propitiatory expression”, since it is meant to propitiate the addressee, that is to placate him/her. That is evident in example (45): [...] *is there any chance you can inform me kindly?*, where the request to be informed is already expressed in the very indirect (hence, very polite) question preceding *kindly*. It is also evident in example (95): *Kindly, I will do so tomorrow*, in which the author, a student, is primarily giving information to his/her supervisor, but introducing it with a propitiatory word, *kindly*, in case the latter was not happy about the information. It is worth noting that all the ten cases where the meaning of the author’s message was deemed to be “indeterminate” contain this *kindly* claimed to have been used as a phatic expression, that is without making the meaning of the message any clearer - i.e. whether it was a request or something else.

3.2 *Kindly* is addressed to everyone and has a positive connotation in KenE usage.

This heading was motivated by three quotations from three different sources: the first one comes in the form of an answer to the following online question: “**Kindly and please: Is it correct to use both of them together?**”, posted by Arash on 14 Jul. 2021 (and accessed by one of the authors on 08 Dec. 2023).² Below is part of the answer (concerning only *kindly*) given by Big Ben Academy (an English teaching organization operating from Malaysia):

² Accessed on 8 Dec 2023 at <https://bigbenacademy.edu.my/please-and-kindly/>

Proper use of “kindly”

“Kindly” is used when you are **talking to a group of people** or **writing for someone**. Never ever say kindly to your friends, family, or directly to a person, this is going to sound weird. Try to use it in **formal emails**, like “The meeting starts at 2 pm, kindly bring your laptop.” Also, if you are a tour leader and you have a microphone, you want to inform everyone to kindly be back at the station before lunch time. In all these cases, you can substitute “please” with “kindly,” but do not use both.

The second quotation was also produced in a similar context, as an answer to the following online question: **“Can we use please and kindly in the same sentence together?”** Below is the answer provided by “Frank Dauenhauer, Former Technical Writer & Editor of Company Publications at Eastman Kodak Products and Services (1960-1991),” on the QUORA platform³:

Although it is technically possible, one or the other is redundant, and no, they should not be used in proximity to each other. To put both in the same sentence would appear to be smarmy or ingratiating.

[...]

The third quotation comes from an English language source whose authority cannot be disputed: the *Collins English Dictionary Online*.

If someone asks you to **kindly** do something, they are asking you in a way which shows that they have authority over you, or that they are angry with you.

[*formal*]

Will you kindly obey the instructions I am about to give?

Let us now have a close look at the content of each quotation at a time.

Regarding the first quotation, which is clearly about the sociolinguistics of *kindly*, one can predict that KenE speakers will express their disbelief at its content and will most likely choose to ignore it completely. “Disbelief” because the highly prescriptive explanation above strongly prohibits (with a *never ever*) all the following things that occur in KenE usage on a daily basis: a) KenE speakers use *kindly* to address individual people, not groups of them; b) they use it while writing for themselves, not for someone else; c) they readily use *kindly* to address their

³ Accessed on 8 Dec 2023 at <https://www.quora.com/Can-we-use-please-and-kindly-in-the-same-sentence-together/>

friends and family members; d) they use it while addressing a person directly. And all this sounds normal, not “weird”, to their addressees! To “crown” it all, they use both *kindly* and *please* together. All these features of KenE *kindly* are illustrated by the 100 examples in the 7 tables.

Concerning the second quotation, while it is less elaborate, it nevertheless is equally highly prescriptive, by unequivocally saying that *kindly* should not come anywhere near *please* and vice versa. Such “a rule” will certainly make us look back at the examples in tables 4 and 5, where the two mitigators follow each other. And we will need to argue that the fact that the authors of those examples used both mitigators in close proximity does not necessarily mean that they meant to be “smarmy” or “ingratiating.” For instance, if we take the author of example (66): *Kindly please help me am stranded*, this person was evidently in some distress and could not have afforded the luxury of playing with words to be smarmy or ingratiating. The same can be said about the author of (72): *Plz kindly save me with 1,000 [Kenya shillings]*. In fact, it would be hard to find an example from all those in tables 4 and 5 whose message would have such a negative connotation implied in *smarmy* and *ingratiating*.

As for the third quotation, it clearly suggests that it is people of a higher social status who are expected to use *kindly* while addressing those of a lower status. This is consistent with Huddleston & Pullum’s (2002: 863) observation (already mentioned in the introduction) that “imperatives can be used as directives” and with Leech’s (2014: 174) observation (also already reported in the introduction) that two of the only four instances of *kindly* (used as a request mitigator) in the British National Corpus were “sarcastic.” In reality, most of the uses of *kindly* discussed in this article were produced by students addressing what they assumed to be polite requests to their lecturers, meaning that they could not have wanted to express any authority over their lecturers and could not have afforded to sound angry with them. As a matter of fact, in a good number of those uses of *kindly* the authors sound desperate. That is why, as already seen, in some cases *kindly* (or a combination of *kindly* and *please*) was used quite redundantly as a mere emphasiser of a request already expressed by the verb *request* itself or by one or more other verbs plus an intensifying adverb. A good illustration of author despair can be found in example (31): *I was humbly [asking] if you could kindly help in retrieving the*

*exam links and forwarding the same **please***, in which all the six words in boldface are used to express one request, that of “being helped.” To borrow the phrase from Levinson (1983: 274), “a bundle of mitigators” had to be used to make one request.

3.3 Do (some) KenE speakers use different *kindly*-based speech-act structures for the same sociolinguistic situation?

The answer to this question is “yes”, if the examples below serve as a case study from one undergraduate student, A.V., who sent SMS and email messages to the head of her academic department.

- (101) *Hello, am [A.V.], a second year student. Am **kindly requesting** when is the CLC 113 supplementary exam?”* (SMS on 24 Jan. 2023; *kindly* used for information-seeking)
- (102) ***Kindly please** Dr B., which platform will we use for tomorrow’s CLC 113 exam? Am requesting for an invite to that exam please* (SMS on 26 Jan. 2023; *kindly* used for information-seeking)
- (103) *Good morning? Did you confirm that I have registered **please**? I don’t want to miss the exams **kindly**. I need your help **please*** (SMS on 27 Jan. 2023; *kindly* used with an indeterminate illocutionary force).
- (104) *Good morning? **Kindly confirm** for me if am registered this time to do the CLC 113 exam **please** so that I don’t miss it again **please**. Am [A.V.], reg no. [X]* (SMS on 14 Aug. 2023; *kindly* used for request)
- (105) *Hello am [A.V.] registration number [X].
I have not received my CLC 214 results, Language in Broadcasting and yet I did the exams. I did the exam on Tuesday 30th May as from 11:30 a.m to 1:30 p.m on mtihani platform. Am **kindly requesting** for confirmation of the results **please**. [REQUEST] Am looking forward to hearing from you. I hope my **request** will be considered* (Email on 23 Aug. 2023; *kindly* used for request)

It transpires from the five examples above that their author has at her disposal at least four of the five *kindly*-mitigated structures performing different speech acts: a) the *kindly* + imperative verb structure (*kindly confirm*) in (104) used to mitigate

a polite request; b) the *kindly please* sequence in (102) used to mitigate an information-seeking statement; c) the *kindly* + the verb *request* used to mitigate an information-seeking statement in (101) and to mitigate a request in (105); d) the use of *kindly* sentence-finally in (104) to mitigate a speech act (*I don't want to miss the exams kindly*) whose nature is indeterminate. There is no reason to believe that this versatile use of *kindly* is just an idiolect of the author of the five examples: it must be a dialectal feature shared by Kenyan English speakers. But this assumption needs to be established through a future study.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to show how the adverb *kindly* is used in a versatile manner to mitigate more than just (polite) requests with which it is associated in WSE. From 105 SMS, WhatsApp and email messages collected by the authors over nine years, the study has shown that the versatile behaviour of *kindly* in Kenyan English is manifested in its ability to occupy different syntactic positions and is thus not limited only to the pre-verbal position allowed for it in World Standard English. Pragmatically, *kindly* is allowed in KenE usage to directly co-occur with *please* and the verb *request*. Further, it is allowed to occur on its own, that is without it being accompanied by the verb whose illocutionary act it is expected to mitigate. All this makes the use of *kindly* much more frequent in KenE than in WSE where *kindly* is hardly reported to be used in polite requests. The linguistic versatility of *kindly* in KenE is an indication that there are practically no restrictions on its sociolinguistic uses, such as that contained in the observation (made about the use of *kindly* in WSE) that *kindly* is used by someone who has authority over the addressee to express anger or sarcasm. Within KenE itself, the very many uses of *kindly* are an indication of how pervasive it is, to the point that in some cases it can only be analysed as carrying the (little) weight of a mere phatic expression. This in turn can explain why *kindly* seems to have been on the rise at the expense of *please*, its competitor in terms of mitigating polite requests. In relation to this, an interesting future study could indeed compare *kindly* and *please* from a diachronic point of view. A good starting point would be the fact that while, as the examples in Table 6 show, a combination of *kindly* and the verb *request* seems to be frequent (see *am*

kindly requesting), that of *please + request* (as in *I am please requesting*) is yet to be encountered by the present authors.

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