

# Semantic Analysis of the Tick (V) Symbol in Tanzanian Context

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## Abstract

This study explores the semantic significance of the tick or check mark (V) symbol in Tanzania, where its use extends to education, business, healthcare, and everyday life. Despite its widespread application, there is limited research on its varied interpretations across different contexts in the world and within Tanzania. Historically, the tick symbol has origins in Roman voting practices, where it represented "veritas" (truth), and its meaning has evolved with changes in writing technology. This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with educators, healthcare professionals, and civil servants, alongside document analysis, to investigate the symbol's semantic meanings. Guided by Semiotic Theory, the research aims to clarify how cultural and contextual factors shape the understanding of the tick symbol, in due course seeking to improve communication practices and enhance comprehension of symbolic meanings in Tanzanian society.

**Keywords:** Semantic analysis, Tick, check mark, symbol, semiotic

## Introduction

Symbols are an important part of human communication, transcending linguistic boundaries and conveying meaning through visual representation. Among these symbols, the

tick (V) is universally recognized, yet its interpretations and applications vary significantly across different cultural and social contexts. In Tanzania, the tick symbol is dominant in various fields, including education, business, healthcare, and everyday communication. However, its semantic implications in these contexts have not been extensively studied, making it a fruitful ground for academic inquiry.

Roy (2018) argues that the tick or checkmark symbol, often used to indicate correctness or affirmation, has an interesting origin that dates back to the Roman Empire. Originally, Roman citizens marked their votes with a 'V' symbol, representing the Latin word "*veritas*," meaning "truth" or "affirmation." Over time, as writing tools advanced, particularly with the arrival of reservoir pens (early versions of fountain pens), the "V" symbol began to change.

According to Wikipedia (2024), the tick or check mark (V) is frequently used as a symbol of affirmation in English-speaking countries due to its simplicity and efficiency. However, its meaning can differ across cultures. For instance, in Swedish schools, a tick or check mark indicates an incorrect answer, while "R" (for "*rätt*," meaning "correct") is used for correct responses. In Finland, the tick or check mark is used to mean "wrong" due to its resemblance to a slanted "v," with correct responses marked differently. In Japan, the "O" mark is used for right answers, with "X" or "V" marking incorrect ones. The Netherlands uses a flourish of approval (*krul*) for affirmation rather than a tick or check mark, and in German-speaking countries, the tick or check mark denotes "correct" or "done," while incorrect answers are marked with "f" (short for "*falsch*," meaning "wrong"). These differences emphasize the diverse interpretations and uses of the tick or check mark across different cultural contexts in the world.

Chihodzi, Mwakapenda, & Ngulube (2023) conducted study on ticks and crosses in primary school mathematics assessments in South Africa and assert that the use of ticks and crosses is a common practice in education and they are regularly used by teachers for the aim

of determining the correctness or incorrectness of responses in writing from learners to assignments provided to them. They further argue that tick and cross are used as key ways of communicating and interacting with learners in relation to achievement of teaching and learning goals. Therefore, this study shows how tick is used to assess students works and interpreted correctness when is marked against the student's responses in school contexts in south Africa.

The tick or check mark (V) symbol is widely used in Tanzania across various fields including education, business, healthcare, and daily communication, yet its meanings and interpretations can vary significantly depending on cultural, social, and institutional contexts. This variability may lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications, particularly in critical areas like education and healthcare. Despite its prevalence, there is limited studies on how the tick symbol is understood in world and within the Tanzanian context. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the meanings or interpretations attributed to the tick symbol in various fields of Tanzanian society, providing insights to improve communication practices and understanding of symbolic meanings in the country.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Semiotic Theory, which was developed from Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and later expanded by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The theory explores how signs and symbols convey meanings within social contexts and emphasizes that different audiences may interpret signs in various ways depending on their cultural and social backgrounds (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Menezes & Vieira, 2019). According to semiotics, the meaning of symbols is not fixed but is shaped by the cultural and social context in which they are used. The tick symbol (V) can be viewed as a sign that carries specific meanings depending on the context in which it appears.

Based on this theory, the meaning of the tick symbol in Tanzania is constructed through social practices, norms, and interactions. The theory considers how Tanzanians use and interpret the symbol based on their cultural background, education, experiences, and social interactions, and how these uses and interpretations may differ from or align with those in other regions or contexts. This theory has been applied in various multimodal and semiotic-related studies, including a study conducted by Mdukula (2022) on the communicative value of the sign 'X' in public spaces in Tanzania, making it relevant to this study as well.

### **Methods and Materials**

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the meanings and cultural significance of the tick (V) symbol in Tanzania. Cresswell (2014) asserts that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.

Data were collected through semi-structured phone interviews with five respondents from diverse backgrounds: a primary teacher, a secondary teacher, a clinical officer, a civil servant from a higher learning institution, and a higher education student as Kothari (2016) argues that interview comprises oral questions that offer the required information orally and may be face to face interaction with subject or interviewee

Purposive sampling was used to select these respondents based on their expertise and experience as it is asserted by Cohen et al. (2008) that purposive sampling as the deliberate selection of sample elements considered typical or representative, based on specific criteria from the population. Additionally, the study involved reviewing documents, textbooks, business reports, and medical records to examine the symbol's use across these contexts. Semiotic analysis was used to examine the tick symbol and its meaning, providing light on how its interpretation differs by context with the aid of information obtained from the respondents' interviewed. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was

obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process to protect individual rights and dignity as ethics is viewed as a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others, and that while truth is good: respect for human dignity is better (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008).

### 3.0 Findings

The findings of the study were analyzed and presented based on the objective, which was to examine the semantic interpretation of the tick symbol in the Tanzanian context. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with experts from various fields to investigate the use and interpretation of the tick symbol. Additionally, the researcher reviewed documents to cross-check the use of the tick symbol across different domains, including education, business, politics, and computer applications.

#### 3.1 The summary of the interpretation of tick (V) symbol

The study found that the tick (V) symbol has different interpretations depending on the context in which it is used. The following table summarizes these findings:

S/N	Context in which Tick (V) symbol is used	Meaning when is used
1.	In elections/selection	It Indicates the choice of the voter It shows selection of correct item
2.	In schools	It indicates correctness or approval of responses It indicates attendance
3.	In digital communication	It shows that short message is delivered or read
4.	In computer application	It is used as bullet to indicate listing
5.	In user interface	It indicates successful actions like form submission or task completion
6.	In inventory management	It shows that the items are verified or checked

Source: Field data (2024)

### 3.2.1 In Elections

The study revealed that the tick or check mark symbol plays a significant role in Tanzania’s electoral processes. Voters are instructed to mark the ballot paper by placing a tick next to their chosen candidate or party. This practice is essential for ensuring clarity in voter intent. However, it can lead to confusion if individuals misinterpret the meaning of the tick due to its use in other contexts where it may signify correctness or approval. For example, some voters might mistakenly believe that placing a tick next to candidates they do not support is correct, reflecting a misunderstanding influenced by educational experiences. In the Tanzanian context, however, the tick or check mark is clearly interpreted as indicating the correct choice of candidate.

CHAMA	MGOMBEA UMAKAMU WA RAIS	MGOMBEA URAIS	ALAMA
CCM	SAMIA Suluhu Hassan	DKT. MAGUFULI John Pombe Joseph	✓
NRA	ALI Khassim Hassan	MASHONA Leopold Lucas	
ADA-TADEA	HASSAN Karamo Kijugwa	SHIBUDA John Paul	
SAU	SATIA Mwanza Bafwa	MUTTAMBEWA Bhan Mgenya	
DEMOKRASIA MAKINI	TABU Mwanza Juma	CECILIA Augustino Mwanza	
NCCR MAGEUZI	AMBAR Khassim Haji	MAGANDA Yohana Kifwa	
CUF	HAMIDA Abdulla Haroshidi	LIPUMBA Ibrahim Hassan	


Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 1: Ballot paper in which a voter puts tick (V) mark to indicate his/her choice

Looking at Figure 1, the symbol “V” indicates that the voter has chosen the candidate along the marked row. Unmarked rows signify that the voter has not selected any of the options listed there. Roy (2018) notes that Roman citizens used the “V” symbol to mark their votes, representing the Latin word “*veritas*,” meaning “truth” or “affirmation.”

Additionally, the tick or check mark is used in selecting items. In various contexts in Tanzania, individuals use the tick mark to indicate their choice from among given options. An item marked with a tick signifies that it has been selected. For example, in hospitals, doctors use ticks to mark issued doses or injections for future follow-up. Figure 2 below shows a document from a hospital with tick marks indicating items selected for current services provided.

**JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA**



**WIZARA YA AFYA, MAENDELEO YA JAMII, JINSIA, WAZEE NA WATOTO**

**KADI YA KUMBUKUMBU YA UCHANJAJI WA CHANJO YA UVIKO-19**

Jina kamili \_\_\_\_\_ Na: **448033**

Namba ya utambulisho \_\_\_\_\_ Tarehe, Kuzaliwa \_\_\_\_\_

Dozi za Chanjo	Weka tick kama amepata	Aina ya Chanjo	Batch/ Lot Number	Tarehe (dd/mm/yy)	Kituo cha chanjo	Maoni ya mtoa huduma
Dozi ya kwanza	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	JJ	1822794	6/16		
Dozi ya Pili	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Source: Field data (2024)

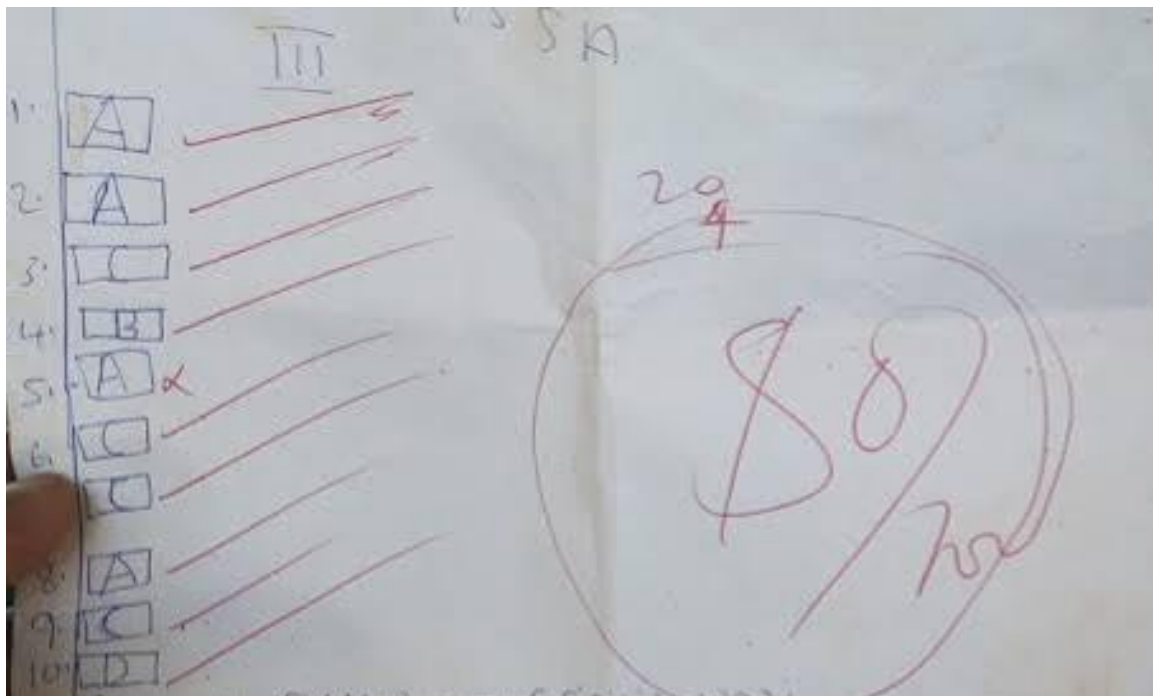
**Figure 2: Showing a form with a box require a tick (V) mark**

### 3.2.2 In Schools

In Tanzania, from primary school to higher education levels, the tick symbol is primarily used to indicate correct responses on quizzes, homework, assignments, tests, and examinations. This practice aligns with the British education system, where ticks are used to

denote correctness. According to Wikipedia (2024), the tick or check mark (V) is frequently used as a symbol of confirmation in English-speaking countries due to its simplicity and efficiency. Teachers commonly place a tick next to correct answers to confirm students' understanding and performance.

The use of the tick symbol in this context serves not only as validation of knowledge but also as a motivational tool, encouraging students to strive for accuracy in their work. Chihodzi, Mwakapenda, and Ngulube (2023) note that placing ticks on students' written assignments is an approach to providing positive feedback. As shown in Figure 3 below, the tick symbol is used to differentiate between correct and incorrect answers in students' work.



**Source:** Field data (2024)

**Figure 3: Showing a student's paper marked with tick (V) to approval responses**

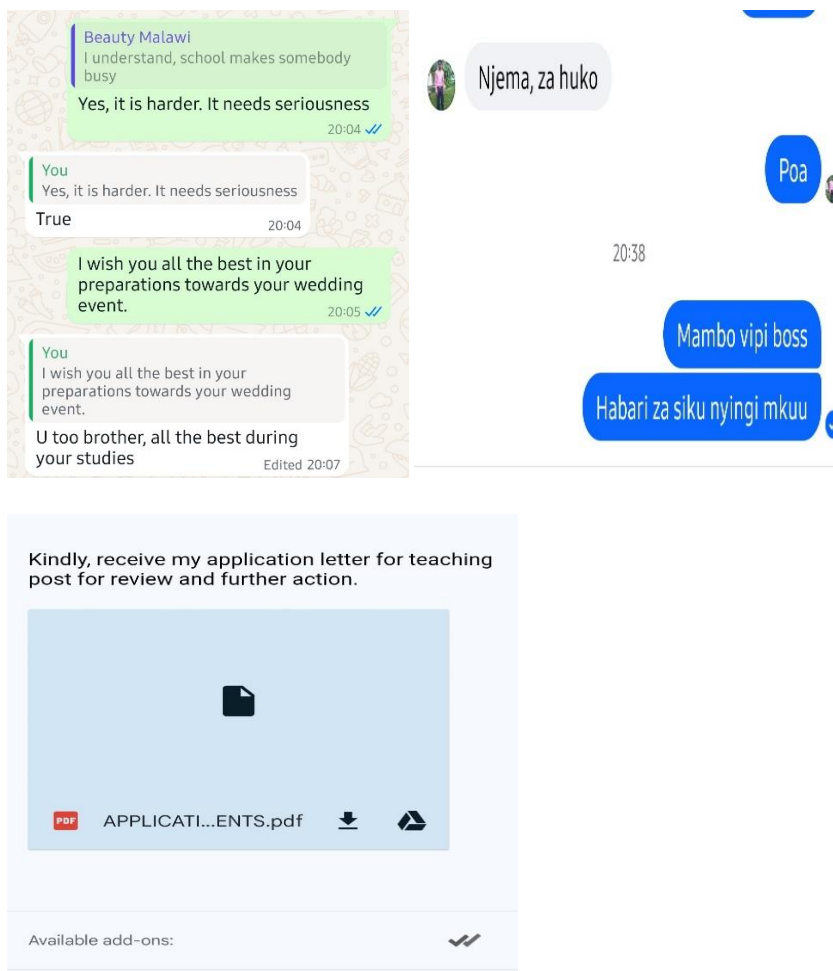
### 3.2.3 In Digital Communication

This study found that messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS, and email use tick symbols to indicate the delivery and read status of messages. A single tick or double ticks can signify that a message has been sent, received, or read. This helps clarify any doubt



for the sender about whether the intended recipient has received the message. By observing the tick symbol, the sender can confirm that the message was delivered or read.

The appearance of the tick symbol in messaging may vary depending on the settings of the device and the application. For instance, in WhatsApp, blue ticks typically indicate that the message was received and read, while grey ticks show that the message was delivered but not yet read by the recipient. Figure 4 below shows the tick symbols used in WhatsApp, Facebook, and email messaging



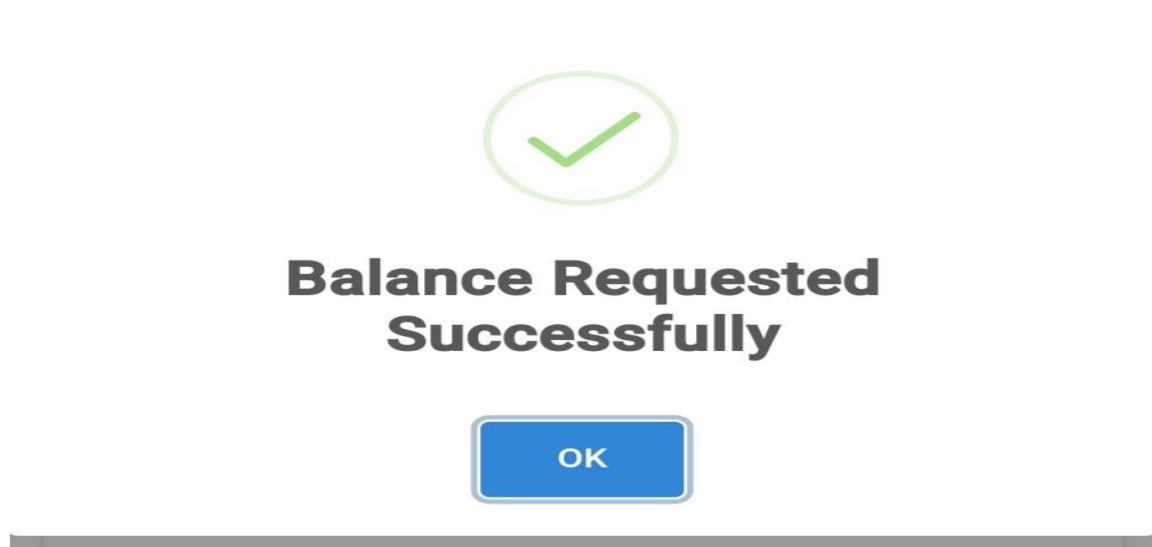
Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 4: Showing social media texts with tick (V) marks indicating its delivery

### 3.2.4 In digital interface

The study revealed that the tick symbol is also widely used in digital interfaces to provide feedback to individuals interacting with digital tools, such as computers and mobile phones, especially when filling out forms or confirming information in online systems. For instance, during form submissions, a tick symbol often appears to indicate successful submission. This visual cue reassures users that their input has been accurately received or saved by the system.

Beyond form submissions, the tick symbol is also frequently employed to signify the completion of various tasks within digital environments. For example, in task management applications, the tick symbol is used to mark tasks as completed, helping users track their progress and manage their workloads efficiently. This simple yet effective feedback mechanism enhances user experience by providing immediate and clear confirmation of actions taken. Users receive this type of feedback when the interface displays symbols like the tick, as illustrated in Figure 5 below



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 5: Showing interface of succesful action**

### 3.2.5 In Computer applications

Computer software, specifically application software, includes several widely used programs such as Excel, PowerPoint, and Microsoft Word. These applications are integral to various professional and academic tasks, offering tools for data analysis, presentations, and document creation. For instance, Excel is used for managing and analyzing data, PowerPoint for creating visual presentations, and Microsoft Word for word processing.

In document formatting, symbols like the tick (✓) are often utilized to visually indicate a list of items. The study found that the tick symbol is commonly used to mark key points in a list. Users may choose to format bullets with tick symbols to enhance clarity and emphasis in their documents. It is vital to note that the tick symbol in this context is solely for listing purposes and does not imply any additional meaning beyond its visual role in organizing content. This usage helps improve readability and ensures that important items are clearly distinguished in text-based documents.



Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 6: Showing tick symbol used in listing

### 3.2.6 In Inventory Management

In fields like business and accounting, the tick symbol is commonly used during auditing to mark items that have been counted, picked, or packed. This practice is crucial for

maintaining accurate inventory records, preventing discrepancies, and ensuring that all processes are correct and complete. The tick symbol acts as a visual confirmation that specific tasks have been performed, which helps streamline operations and reduce errors.

This study included interviews with various experts in the field, highlighted the diverse interpretations of the tick mark in business and accounting contexts. These experts emphasized that while other symbols may also be used for marking, the tick is particularly prevalent due to its simplicity and effectiveness in conveying completion or verification. The tick mark, therefore, plays a vital role in ensuring the integrity of documents and records in business and accounting, making it an indispensable tool in these fields.

Item	Description of Goods	Units	Quantity	Rate	Amount (TZS.)	Warranty Period (where applicable)
1	Concrete block 45mmx15mm	No.	600	1800	1080000 ✓	
2	Cement 42.5	Bags	158	21000	3318000 ✓	
3	Wire mesh	No.	9	25000	225000 ✓	
4	Bars 12mm	No.	6	28000	168000 ✓	
5	Bars 18mm	No.	6	13000	78000 ✓	
6	Birding wire	Kg	10	6000	60000 ✓	
7	Soft wood 4x2	No.	20	7500	150000 ✓	
8	Soft wood 2x2	No.	12	4000	48000 ✓	
9	Plywood	No.	4	6200	24800 ✓	
10	Nails					
A	2½"	Kg	5	4000	20000 ✓	
B	4"	Kg	5	4000	20000 ✓	
C	3"	Kg	5	4000	20000 ✓	
11	Sand	M <sup>3</sup>	18	18000	324000 ✓	
12	Aggregate	M <sup>3</sup>	23	55600	1278800 ✓	
Total Amount for Supply of Goods excluding VAT					7037800	
Add VAT					1266804	
Total Amount for Supply of Goods (including VAT)					8304604	
Goods to supplied to [insert destination of goods]						

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 7: A form showing items with tick (V) mark for verification

## Conclusion

The study aimed to analyze the semantic interpretation of the tick symbol as used in various fields in Tanzania. It was revealed that the tick symbol has varying interpretations depending on the context in which it is used. The contexts in which the mark may be found include elections, schools, digital communication, computer interfaces, and inventory

management. Therefore, the tick symbol does not carry the same meaning when it appears in different environments; people require knowledge of a particular field to understand its meaning.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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