

Juggling Words, Terms and Idioms to Advance Political Agenda in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania: Profiling the Electioneering and Referendum Discourse

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Abstract

The study focuses on the multilingual terms that have developed in East African post-electoral period. Some of the political terminologies, idioms, phrases and colour words are presented as deliberate word choices by political operators. Unraveling the meanings and semantic shifts inherent in the East African political operators' linguistic choices at the syntactic, lexical and semantic levels informs the basis of this study

Key words: East African political Discourse, multilingual terms, semantic shifts, linguistic choices and the syntactic, lexical and semantic levels

1.1.0 Introduction

The Kenyan constitutional referendum in 2010, The Tanzanian General Elections in 2010 and the Ugandan General Elections in 2011 took East African political discourse to very high levels. The ability of an East African politician to invent, re-invent, shift, twist and manipulate multilingual terms amidst high-tempo political discourses has found verbal expression and linguistic life in post-electoral period. The use of these terms highlighted the inter-connectedness between language and politics in East African. Chilton (2004) asserts that “politics is very largely the use of language.” Butt (2004) makes a similar albeit somewhat stronger claim when he writes that “the very use of language is ideological.” He argues that this is so because “the use of language necessitates choices between different modes of meaning.” It is precisely these choices that are simply unavoidable during political campaigns (meetings) and have to be made at all levels of language (such as semantic, syntactic, lexical and so on) of language that can be used by political actors to attain political effect.

Competition on the political arena is often spiced by effective mobilization tools central to which is language.

Hasan (1996) states, “we not only use language to shape reality, but we use it also to defend that reality, against anyone who’s alternative values might threaten ours.” Such linguistic choices alluded to above and which characterize all forms of political discourse, can be overt or covert in nature and are obtainable in East African.

East African countries endured a tough electioneering period inside the last two years (2010-2011). The region’s political actors, borrowing from their rich multilingual repertoire, displayed rare gift of the garb. In Kenya, the post-referendum period saw the coming to birth of multilingual terms such as: the water melon, prayer meetings, O’campo 6, KKK (Kikuyu, kamba and kalenjin), G7, Kapenguria 6, Red card, etc. Uganda has its fair share of the M7, walking races, pakalast, Temangalo, Bicupa, Mahogany, sprays, whereas Tanzania has Kujivua gamba (skin shading), dark market, chakachu (adulterate ‘fuel’), kijani (green), loliondo, kikombe cha babu (grandfather’s cup), etc. Such political discourses have undergone some semantic shifts. Unraveling the meanings and semantic shifts inherent in the East African political operators’ linguistic choices at the syntactic, lexical and semantic levels informs the basis of this study.

1.2.0 Political discourse Theory

Political discourse analysis studies political text and talk, i.e. communicative acts which have “a direct functional role as a form of political action in the political process” (van Dijk 1997) and which are performed by political actors, mostly but not only “professional politicians such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties” (van Dijk 1997). One of the principal goals of political discourse analysis, according to Wilson (2001), is to identify the many ways in which language can be used or manipulated by political actors to produce specific effects in the political realm. The second objective establishes a link with political science. In that case such a study would adopt what van Dijk (1997) called an ‘integrated approach’. It goes beyond a purely language-based analysis of the speeches in so far as it also examines the functionality of the observed discursive practices in their wider political context. I considered these ideas while analyzing the East African politicians’ linguistic choices at the syntactic, lexical and semantic levels in this study.

2. 1.0 Language manipulation strategy

Linguistic choices on the syntactic level of language can be covert operations, i.e. operations that might go unnoticed by the listener or reader because they “lie beneath the threshold of consciousness” (Butt 2004:270). Choices on the lexical level of language, on the other hand, tend to be more or less overt operations, in the sense that they rarely go fully unnoticed by the listener or reader since they lie above the threshold of consciousness. Both overt and covert operations, however, can be used to political effect, and exert the desired influence on public opinion. Bellow we present strategies that have been employed:

2 1.1 Antonymous lexical choices

Words with positive connotations will be used to describe the in-group and its qualities whereas words with negative connotations will be used to evoke the out-group and its supposed shortcomings and faults. These antonymous lexical sets are often made up of “moral value vocabulary” (Chilton 2004), words that help to establish a dichotomy between a moral *we* versus an immoral *them*. Antonyms are therefore used where one group expresses itself the extreme end opposite of the other.

Indeed, language and the quasi infinite number of linguistic choices it offers political actors among the rules and components of its levels allows for the expression of differing and even opposing worldviews and values. In East African political discourse it is common to have two parties arguing at the extreme ends. Examples:

- WAPINZANI (Swahili for opposition) vs. MPINZANI (Swahili for a fellow competitor)
- Siasa (swahili for politics) vrs si hasa (swahili for not true)
- Wanamapinduzi (sawhili for revolutionists) vrs Mashabiki (swahili for fans)
- Wanaharakati or wanamageuzi (Swahili for pro-change activists) vrs Wakereketwa (Swahili for political party die-hards)
- Wazalendo (Swahili for patriots) vrs Waheshimiwa (Swahili for elites)
- Wenyeinchi (Swahili for country owners) vrs Wanainchi (Swahili for citizens)
- Kazi bora (Swahili for a job well done) vrs bora kazi (Swahili for poor workmanship)

2 1.2 Habituation

The frequency with which linguistic choices and patterns linked to a particular worldview are instantiated in a communicative act or series of acts may lead to their habituation. They become part “general public’s collective meaning potential.” In other words, the repeated linguistic choices and discursive patterns influence the general public’s perception. They lay a role in establishing a common view of the world and lead to shared views of social, economic and global phenomena. Examples:

- **Kapenguria 6**-Six prominent Kenyans-who included founding President Jomo Kenyatta-were jailed in 1952 at a notorious North Rift prison called Kapenguria for agitating for independence. They were considered innocent national heroes. The O’ocampo 6 sought to gain mileage by comparing themselves with the Kapenguria 6.
- **G7**-Ordinarily a group of seven (7) industrialised countries but adopted by seven (7) Kenyan regional leaders out to derail Mr. Odinga’s presidential ambitions come 2012. The G7 loaded message is that they are stronger, united in ideology and possessing numbers than lone ranger Odinga. A historical fact is that the industrialised G7 beat the Soviet Union thus domestication of a worldview.
- **Pentagon**-The term refers to ODM top decision making organ which comprises a team of five regional leaders with Odinga as captain. However, and world over, the Pentagon refers to the USA defense headquarters. Unsuspecting voters are wont to perceive ODM’s Pentagon just like the invincible USA Army with the requisite technology, united, with firepower, a superpower, robust, equipped, tried and tested.
- **Hague**-a Netherlands based International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide and crimes against humanity. Hague is generally used in Kenya to refer to any prison or a place for justice and cripple impunity.

2 1.3 Use of legitimising and delegitimising language

Political actors, therefore, have to be doubly strategic in their language use. The use of legitimising language is usually accompanied by the use of its counterpart, ‘delegitimising language’, i.e. language which negatively depicts the opposing worldview or approach as well as those who hold these different opinions and values.

- Fisadi is a Swahili word for *the corrupt*. Sad as it may, Tanzanian opposition activists have generalized it to refer to mainly CCM leaders thanks to the many corrupt activities associated with its leadership.
- Water melon is a term that gained prominence during Kenya's constitution referendum campaigns. Voters were expected to choose between RED (for No) and GREEN (for Yes). Politicians who played it safe (neutrals) or were ambivalent during the campaigns were coded water melons. The logic is simple in that a water melon has a green colour on the outer cover and red colour in the inside.

2 1.4 Bipolar representations

Political actors use bipolar representations often while on campaign train. The repeated instantiation of these binary conceptualisations tends, furthermore, to lead to similar bipolar representations in the collective consciousness of the general public. In the end the political operators assign meanings and definition to words to not only belittle their opponents but also to manipulate voters.

Examples:

- Vuvuzela (Plastic horns) vs. democrats
- Wapinzani (oppositionists) vs. Shadow government
- ODM rebels' vs. ODM reformists
- Movement vs. pro change agents

2.2.0 Other common syntactic strategies

They concern the use of:

2 2 1 Deictic pronouns-such as us and them

- Wale wale this refers to a Kiswahili compound for 'those those'. It is a code used by the opposition to refer to anti-change (Tanzania's) ruling party (CCM) activists.
- Wenzetu This is a Kiswahili possessive pronoun or adjective that stands for 'ours'. As a political code, it is used by political actors to refer to a member of a different political party.

2 2.2 Syllable, word order substitutions and slogans distortions

- CCM-Chukua Chako Mapema instead of Chama Cha Mapindunzi
- Kazi Kwa Vijana (Jobs for the youth) slogan has been given a rider Pesa Kwa Wazee (money to the elderly). It implies that whereas the youth may work, it is the elderly who corruptly earn the wages.
- RAILA has its syllables distorted to read ALIAR when read from right to left.
- Siasa (politics) corrupted to Si Hasa (not true)

2 3.0 Idioms and idiomatic expressions

Idioms laced with political undertones have also been used:

- **Kujivua gamba** Kiswahili for skin shading. This is a term advanced by CCM to rid itself off corrupt leadership from its rank and file. Skin shading is commonly used by reptiles to shade off old skin/ scales. Kujivua gamba is commonly used to refer to any person who needs desirable change or transformation.
- **Ballot stuffing** was common during the election period. It acquired a new meaning later. For example, if a married woman is caught cheating in Uganda, people might say it was because the husband could not stuff her ballot box well.

- **Movement** is a term that refers to NRM. When two friends meet and one asks the other "Are you in Movement?" he is simply asking if he is an NRM supporter.
- **Tengamalo** this name is commonly used to describe current Ugandan Prime minister Amama Mbabazi who owned a land at Temangalo. "Temangalo land" is a wetland that Mr. Amama Mbabazi in cohorts with former Ugandan NSSF boss Chandi Jamwa wanted to sell illegally to NSSF at an allegedly inflated price of 11 billion Uganda shillings. Temangalo has since become a term for any mega financial scandal.
- **Dark market** this term was first used on the floor of Tanzanian parliament by youthful opposition MP Ezekiel Wenje in reference to secret (informal) meetings held by ruling party (CCM) committee chairpersons to cut deals on pertinent matters. The Nyamagana (CHADEMA) was forced to withdraw the term and replace it with 'white market' for wrongly accusing House speaker Ann Makinda of endorsing wrong decisions arrived at outside the established parliamentary mechanisms. Dark market is now generalized to refer to any meetings held in secret.
- **Pita Kati** this term which is Kiswahili term for 'pass in the middle' is associated with current Kenyan vice president, Kalonzo Musyoka. He claimed prophetically that after the hotly contested Kenyan 2007 presidential election, he would penetrate in between President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga. True to his word, after signing of the National Peace and Reconciliation Accord following an inconclusive election, he was made a vice president thereby standing in between them.
- **Chakachu** Initially used as Swahili for (fuel) adulteration whereby unscrupulous traders would mix kerosene and petrol so as to make a kill. This word refers to any social evil such as exam cheating, skewed imprests, professional misconduct, 'cooked records', poor quality services, contraband goods, etc.
- **Walking races** started as walk to work protests by Ugandan opposition guru-Kyiza Bisigye-against the high costs of fuel and other basic commodities. The government used maximum force and brutality to crash down the protests. Mechanisms used included pepper spraying of leaders-including Mr.Kyiza.

2.4.0 Coinage

Coinage of political terms from words and numbers, code-mixing, acronyms, pet (nick) names and place names. This word formation processes have generally brought to birth new words. They are discussed in details:

2.4.1 Joining words and numbers

6 (Kiswahili for six) Sita simply written as 6 on social media is Tanzanian minister for East African Affairs and a former highly regarded speaker of the national assembly in 2006-2012. He was forced out by CCM due to his independent views on issues. Whenever the current speaker Ann Makinda misjudges the public mood, tweets such as 'we need 6' resurface.

O’ocampo 6 This is a group of six prominent Kenyans namely: The Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, Former Minister William Ruto, Radio Journalist Joshua Sang, Minister Henry Kosgey, Former police commissioner General Hussein Ali and The Head of civil service and the secretary to the Cabinet Ambassador Francis Muthaura. The six (6) have been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) as persons bearing the greatest responsibility for post-election violence that occurred in Kenya in 2008. Whenever people use the term O’ocampo 6 or simply ‘the 6’ Kenyans easily decipher the suspects.

G7 Ordinarily a group of seven (7) industrialised countries but adopted by seven (7) Kenyan regional leaders out to derail Mr. Odinga’s presidential ambitions come 2012.

M7 Ugandan president is called Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Now Museveni is pronounced as /*museveni*/ hence M7 (M for *mu* and 7 for *seven*)-take note of the similarity in pronunciation.

Kapenguria 6-Six prominent Kenyans-who included founding President Jomo Kenyatta-were jailed in 1952 at a notorious North Rift prison called Kapenguria for agitating for independence. They were considered innocent national heroes.

2.4.2 Code-Mixing Lexical Borrowing

PakalastThis word is a blend from both Kiswahili and English language derivatives. **Paka** is Swahili term for ‘until/ awaiting/ pending/ in anticipation of’ whereas **last** is English for ‘final/ very last/ after everything/ end/ in anticipation of etc.’ The purpose of the *pakalast* propaganda was to inform their competitors and gullible electorates that M7 would be there until end. This Museveni campaign slogan was initially used by WARID telecoms in Uganda as a measure for product strength and reliability.

Vuvuzela Oxford (2010:1666) defines a vuvuzela as “a long plastic instrument in the shape of a trumpet that makes a very loud noise when you blow it and it is popular with football fans in South Africa.

Maombi meetings nationwide maombi (Swahili for prayer) meetings were held countrywide to proclaim solidarity with the O’O campo 6. The irony is the prayer meetings-which should ordinarily shoe decorum-turned in to Odinga and O’O campo bashing. They took the format of real egoistic political meetings. Nowadays patrons are wont to christen similar like-minded fellows meetings as prayer meetings instead of political, social or business meetings. This brings to birth the closeness of state and politics in Kenya.

2.4.3 Acronyms and word order substitutions

- **KKK** Kikuyu, Kamba and Kalenjin coalition. A political tag given to a group of like-minded political leaders from the Kikuyu, Kamba and Kalenjin. They were depicted as a bunch of tribalists and anti-K (read Kenya).
- **EPA** External payment Account: a financial scandal in Tanzania. The term has been generalized to stand for any mega corrupt activity.
- **CCM** Chukua chako mapema (take yours early-literally steal/grab/ be corrupt) is a corruption of Chama Cha Mapinduzi. CCM is the largest yet ruling political party in Tanzania which has been accused of grand corruption activities within its rank and file.

- **ODM** Corrupted to read *Odinga* Democratic Movement which is a corruption of Orange Democratic Movement. ODM is the largest party by parliamentary representation in Kenya (2008-2012). This distortion and word order substitution was advanced by rebel ODM MP's who had differed with their party leader, Hon. Raila Odinga.

2.5.0 Generalizations of pet (nick) names and Titles

Dokta/ Doctor the East African political leadership has developed an obsession with elitism. In Tanzania, we saw supporters of the two largest parties fighting over the real and unreal Doctor.

Mahogany is a pet name given to Gilbert Bukenya, former Vice President, coz he was thought to be tough politically and hard nut to crack. But as fate would have it, he has since lost his post as Vice President in recent cabinet reshuffle and is currently facing corruption charges over handling of Commonwealth Heads of state and government meeting (CHOGM) funds a few years ago.

Bicupa pronounced vichupa this name is used to describe former Kampala Mayor Nasser Ndege Seggabala. The name is derived from Lugganda name "bicuppuli" pronounced vichupuli which refers to *fake things*. Those who refer to him as bicupa believe that he is *a fake*, because he is not educated, with a poor command of English language and has never kept a promise.

Mama Mabira pronounced Mavira is a name given to a female Ugandan parliamentarian called Beatrice Anywa. She fought hard and successfully in opposing a government's plan to give out the expansive and indigenous Mabira forest to investors who wanted to cut trees and plant sugar cane plantation. She literary saved the forest hence mama mabira.

Kiwani pronounced as chiwaani is a common name now used to describe 'fake' or non-original/non-branded items sold on the Ugandan local market. It may also refer to activities done by people but generally considered as fake or untrue. It derives its origin from a song by a famous Ugandan musician Bobi wine in his song Kiwani.

2.6.0 Place names

'**Nenda Loliondo** unywe kikombe cha babu' loosely translated as go to loliondo and take a sip from the grandfather's cup. Loliondo is a place in northern Tanzania that was made famous by a traditional healer. Sick people from home and abroad thronged the village to 'drink a cup of his miraculous drug.' The name Loliondo has been assimilated in to political discourse to imply 'a savior.' Parties often tease opponents to go to loliondo for inspiration.

***Hague**-(the explanation given elsewhere applies).

Mpererwe is a Kampala suburb and home to opposition leader Kizya Besyige. The small town became the centre at which the walk to work protests were launched. The brutal force exercised by the military and the police led to many injuries. To many, Mpererwe has become synonymous with 'walk to work protests.'

3.0 Sexually loaded vocabulary

The relationship between political terminologies and sexual loading of terms is widespread. Since discussion on sex is culturally governed by taboos and innuendos, many a political terms have acquired sexual connotations.

Kilimo kwanza is a Tanzanian slogan translated as 'Agriculture first.' This is a clarion call to citizens to enhance farming as a sure way to wealth creation. Local populace has distorted it to mean more sexual activity to get many children (voters).

Chakachu, which initially referred to 'fuel adulteration,' has gained notoriety as referring to 'sexual intercourse' or any lady who has lost the traditionally cherished virginity.

Temangalo is a wetland that the current prime minister Amama Mbabazi and former NSSF boss Chandi Jamwa wanted to sell illegally. Nowadays it has been sexualised by Uganda's tabloid Red Pepper. When Mr. A is accused of raping Ms.Z, Red Pepper will say Mr.A caught raiding Ms. Z's Temangalo.

Consultations and Coalition The Kenyan coalition government's decisions are arrived at after proper consultations between the prime minister and the president. Time and again members of the either side of the coalition partners (ODM or PNU) have leveled accusations at each other as having acted in bad faith without proper consultation. In Kenyan street discourses marriages or relationships are *coalitions* whereas *dates or even sexual activities* are Consultations.

4.0 Colour

Manipulation of Colour as a tool for mass mobilization and party identity

KIJANI is Swahili for green colour. CCM rank and file use green uniforms. The CCM code is simply kijani

Red card was associated with the NO referendum campaigns in Kenya. The YES campaign touted them as cheats who had already red carded and out of the game (read contest). Red was associated with violence/ bloodshed and pain whereas green represented life and continuity. To a great extent a number of voters were easily swayed a side by such words.

5.0 Conclusion

- Choice of lexically loaded vocabulary by political actors is deliberate. A significant number of such terms are derived from Kiswahili vocabulary given that it generally accepted as the language of politics in Kenya and Tanzania.
- Choice of lexically loaded vocabulary at times borders on hate speech hence necessary legislation need to be enacted to moderate and enhance healthy political debates and competition. The temptation for a political actor is normally to use lexically loaded terms (insults, word order distortions and substitutions) to tarnish a competitor's name.
- Most of the political vocabulary has undergone semantic shifts
- New political terms came to birth as a result of morphological processes such as blending (of code mixing), borrowing. etc
- Some of the political terms are crafted for short-term political expediency-hence code mixing and generalization. Kiswahili language purists should help address such anomalies.
- Colour which is a semantic universal is an important mass mobilizing tool in East African Discourse.
- Local idioms, place and personal names have been immortalized in local political discourses.

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