

A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE DURING THE 2010-2014 MAU FOREST RESTORATION DEBATE IN KENYA

Moinani, A.M.¹, Barasa, M.N.¹ and Ong'au, E.³

Kisii University, P. O. Box 408-40200, Kisii, Kenya

Email: albert.mogambi@yahoo.com, barasamargaret@yahoo.com, eucamore@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Climate change and global warming are challenges facing the world today. This problem is aggravated by the fast disappearance of forest cover in the world. The Mau Complex is not only Kenya's largest water tower but also the largest closed canopy ecosystem. The forest is therefore of great importance nationally and globally. In spite of its national and global importance, there has been a proliferation of political utterances against the efforts to rehabilitate this water tower. This paper seeks to describe the linguistic features manifest in political discourse and their social implications for forest conservation in the country. This study was guided by a combination of Corpus Linguistics and Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Downsampling procedure was used to select 10 speeches by political leaders on Mau Forest saga. This study focused on the utterances of the political leaders who were opposed to the conservation cause. These speeches were obtained from the national archives for transcription and analysis. The CDA analysis was carried out on a sample of texts from the corpus and the data analysed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The T-Test and Mutual Information (MI) score were employed as measures of significance. The t-score ranking was used to measure the certainty of the collocation while the MI-score was used to test the strength of the collocation in the corpus. Further, the CDA analysis on linguistic features indicated that political leaders' utterances influence the way people think about the Mau Forest conservation. The results indicated that the co-occurrence of keywords and their collocations were strong and their frequency was higher than expected. The findings showed that utterances laden with negative attitude undermined the Mau Forest conservation efforts. Further the dominant use of the pronominal "we" "me" and "my" were for identity and inclusion with regard to the Mau Forest conservation. It is recommended that conservationists should interpret the potent messages of language and its ability to influence people and society. Thus linguists should use their expertise with language to complement the efforts of natural scientists in the field of conservation. This study would be beneficial to Government and policy makers by indicating that language can help us achieve shift in attitudes and behaviour on conservation issues. The study is also of significance to Ecolinguistics because it would endeavour to reveal the interrelationship between language and forest conservation.

Keywords: Persuasive strategies, ideology, attitude, political discourse, environmental conservation

INTRODUCTION

The voices of political leaders in regard to the conservation of the Mau forest in Kenya in the last decade form the focus of this study. A voice is a powerful source for spreading beliefs and forming attitudes. Research has proved that the power of the voice is incomparable to anything else in the world. Different voices in history which have stood out include that of Martin Luther King Junior against racism in America, Adolf Hitler's voice of racial hatred and discrimination in Germany, and Jesus Christ's voice of love and forgiveness. The social impact of these voices has been phenomenal and is felt in the world to date. Kristen and Barbra (2000) also argue that there are a number of voices which have revolutionized the world in terms of environmental awareness. These include the voices of John Muir (American writer), Marjory Douglas (American journalist), and Wangari Maathai (Kenyan Biologist and politician). These individuals' speeches and writings on conserving the environment for future generations raised awareness among governments and

influenced policies on conserving the environment in different parts of the world. There is need therefore to investigate the role played by the voices surrounding the Mau forest discourse during the 2010-2014 Mau Forest restoration debate.

Goshgarian (1998) asserts that the social impact of language is just powerful. This is because language can be used to lead and mislead and can also be used to distort reality, to hurt others and to shape our perception of the world. Politicians use language to make their hearers zealots on behalf of the programmes they espouse, consequently making them form opinions favourable to their predetermined ends. This study seeks to determine the connections between political discourse and forest conservation because public debate goes a long way in shaping people's opinions on many different issues manifest in political speeches. This is because the language political leaders' use plays a big role in attitude formation towards various issues in society. Politicians use language to convey information, persuade their hearers, and convey

attitudes, feelings and emotions. There is need therefore to find out the relationship between language use and forest conservation in Kenya.

Other studies such as Malvern (2000), Van Dijk (2000) and Potter (2009) have also shown that politicians use language in such a way that ensures they win support from the public masses. They use language to bond the minds of the public masses in favour of the politicians' viewpoints. Discourse analyses of political utterances have equally shown that political utterances exhibit language techniques which make hearers form opinions favourable to speakers' predetermined ends. Therefore, political leaders have been known to use language to lead and mislead, distort reality and to shape society's perception of the world (Goshgarian, 1998).

The Mau complex is Kenya's largest water tower. It spreads over four hundred thousand hectares making it Kenya's largest closed canopy ecosystem (Ministry of Environment report, 2010). It is the single most important water catchment in Rift Valley and Western Kenya. This is because it is the source of all major rivers which form tributaries from as far as Lake Turkana in the North to Lake Natron in the south and also to Kenya's most populous Lake Victoria basin. Further, the Mau Forest complex regulates water flow, mitigates flooding, regulates ground water recharge and most importantly mitigates climate change by storing carbon. The forest is therefore globally important for mitigating climate change. In spite of its national and global importance, many areas of the forest have been deforested and degraded in the past few decades (Ministry of Environment report, 2010).

The Government and development partners embarked on a programme to rehabilitate the forest. This project cost two hundred and thirty one billion shillings in the last ten years (NCCRS 2013). Despite such efforts, political leaders from Rift Valley have come out strongly and campaigned in public rallies against the Mau Forest restoration programme (NCCRS 2013). The forest restoration programme has been turned into a political issue. For instance, between 2005 and 2013, the forest conservation featured prominently in political campaigns in the Rift Valley, especially during electioneering periods. In the meantime, large tracts of forest have been cleared and turned into farmland (NCCRS 2013). The consequences of such practices have already been observed in Kenya: shrinking arable land, persistent dry spells, flooding and an unpredictable weather pattern (Ministry of Environment report, 2010). Ironically, many areas of the Mau Forest Complex have been deforested or degraded in the past few decades, in spite of its national and global importance. Degazettement of forest reserves and continuous widespread encroachment has led to the destruction of over one

hundred thousand hectares since 2000 (Ministry of Environment Report, 2010). This scenario has impacted negatively on rivers originating from the western and eastern slopes of the Mau Forest. These include Ewaso Nyiro, Mara, Sondu, Molo and Njoro. The forest loss has therefore resulted to ecological and hydrological changes which threaten the sustainable future of areas downstream (NCCRS, 2013).

The Government, development partners and other stakeholders have campaigned so hard for environmental conservation. Such efforts are aimed at restoring Kenya's forest cover which UNEP 2010 reports indicate stands at two percent instead of the globally recommended minimum of 10 percent. UNEP and other environment agencies have warned that unless this minimum forest cover is attained, the country risks catastrophic ecological disasters. UNEP and other stakeholders have committed millions of dollars in forest conservation projects in the country. Over two thousand people had returned to the forest in spite of the forceful evictions carried out by the government in 2015 (The East African Standard, March 4, 2015).

The Government initiated a move in 2010 to evict forest dwellers from the Mau forest so as to allow for rehabilitation of the depleted sections of the forest. The Government and other development partners have so far spent a total of two hundred and thirty one billion shillings in the last ten years for the forest conservation programme (National Climate Change Response Strategy, 2013). In spite of this ecological zone being under the threat of depletion and millions of livelihoods threatened, a section of the political class came out and campaigned strongly against this move. The politicians held public rallies in various parts of the country to make their viewpoints known to the general public.

Therefore the many studies carried on political discourse such as Goshgarian (1998), Malvern (2000), and Potter (2009) have shed considerable light on the power of language in influencing public opinion and attitude formation towards political viewpoints. However, research has shown that conservation has become an integral part of modern politics. Consequently, there is need to shift focus to the politics of climate change and global warming as emerging issues in society. This implies that there is more that linguists need to do to reveal the underlying interrelationship between language and environmental conservation. This is because language has the ability to influence people and society in terms of attitude and behaviour (Schultz, 1992). This study therefore sets out to investigate the Mau forest discourse and examine its implications for forest conservation in the country. Thus the specific research question was to establish in

what ways forest conservation is linguistically defined and constructed in the 201-2014 Mau Forest Conservation Programme?

Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

Political discourse is the formal exchange of reasonable views as to which of several alternative courses of action should be taken to solve societal problems (Johnson and Johnson, 2000). It is a method of decision-making. That is, political discourse is about which viewpoints politicians would like their hearers to adopt so as to solve societal issues. Kristen and Barbra et al (2000) on 'Approaches to environmental issues' pose a very important question: can one individual change the way people think about environmental issues? They argue that dealing with environmental issues at personal, national or global levels involves making choices. That is, the viewpoint an individual chooses has a great influence on how others view environmental issues. They cite examples of leaders in the world whose speeches and writings on environmental issues influence the way many people think about environmental conservation.

These include John Muir (American writer), Theodore Roosevelt (US President), Rachel Carson (British Writer), Marjory Douglas (American Journalist) and Wangari Maathai (Kenyan Biologist, politician). These are few examples of individuals whose speeches and writings on environmental conservation are known to have had a positive influence on people's attitude towards wildlife and environmental conservation. These individuals spoke and wrote persuasively about conserving the environment for future generations. They won hearts for their course, raised awareness among governments and influenced policies that favoured environmental conservation in various parts of the world. In the contemporary times, US President, Barack Obama and the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis are among key leaders who have expressed concern over environmental degradation. In his State of the Union address (Daily Nation, August 3, 2015), President Obama observed that climate change was no longer an issue for future generations but a reality for the current generation. He said that taking a stand against climate change is a moral obligation and promised to rally world leaders to champion this course to save the world from a looming climatic catastrophe.

Pope Francis on his part told the 70th United Nations Assembly that there is need for urgent action to halt the earth's destruction through environmental degradation (Daily Nation, September 29, 2015). The Pope said that he had launched a teaching document to champion the rights of the environment. He said that the environment has rights and mankind has no authority to abuse them. He urged world leaders and governments to take action against those who were responsible for environmental

degradation because of selfish and boundless thirst for money. These sentiments also featured prominently during the World Summit on Climate Change in France (COEPIC 2015). The summit agreed to set timelines in the fight against climate change with the hope that the deliberations would help in influencing world leaders to set commitments in tackling climate change. This paper endeavours to answer the question posed by Kristen and Barbra (2000) as to whether the political leaders' utterances influence the way people think about the Mau Forest conservation. This study also considered the view-points of Kenya's political leaders and determined the connection between language use and forest conservation during the 2010-2014 Mau Forest restoration debate. This is because the utterances made by politicians influence the viewpoints of the masses (Melvern, 2000). Politicians are also known to vigorously drum up public support for their viewpoints on critical issues in society. Politicians will go to any length to rally the ignorant public behind their viewpoints, which are usually meant to serve selfish interests and political parties.

Language is a powerful force that shapes people's mind and society's attitudes and ultimately, behavior (Schultz, 1992). What is written or said exerts a lot of influence on people's political attitude (Mutz, 1996, Wood, 1993). It has also been observed that politicians use language persuasively. They have mastered the art of persuasion in which they use language to induce a change in belief, attitude, or behavior of another person or group through transmission of a message in a given context (Jones&Peccei, 2004, Goshgarian, 1998, Schultz, 1992). Most conservationists appear to be deaf to the potent messages of language and blind to its ability to influence people and society. Therefore linguists are urged to use their expertise with language to complement the efforts of natural scientists in the field of conservation (Schultz, 1992, Fill, 2001). This study addressed Schultz's and Fill's concerns by unearthing interrelationship between political discourse and forest conservation in Kenya. It showed how political leaders' language use is embedded with feelings and beliefs about forest conservation.

Ethnic communities that live close to nature will use their languages to create solidarity between themselves and the environment and for exploitative discourse. One can use CDA framework to analyze or criticize such speakers' discourse by looking at the words, syntax and pragmatics of spoken and written texts. (Harre and Muhlhausler, 1999). They argue that such analysis focusing on such texts as political speeches, green ads, and articles on the environment will enrich Ecolinguistics as a thriving field of study. This study strives to respond to Harre and Muhlhausler's concerns. The study also uses the CDA framework to analyze political speeches on the Mau forest restoration

to reveal how speakers use words and phrases to achieve legitimation and de-legitimation and also to share their ideologies with their audience. The findings will enrich Ecolinguistics as an emerging area of study.

Political discourse entails political speeches interviews, programmes, campaigns during elections or propaganda that typically focuses on the preferred topics of in-group and out group representation (van Dijk, 2000). Van Dijk further argues that implication is one of the most powerful notions in a critical analysis of political discourse. Words, clauses and other textual expressions may imply concepts or propositions that may be inferred on the basis of background knowledge. This feature has significant ideological dimension since the analysis of the 'unsaid' is sometimes more revealing than what is expressed in the text. The current study will look at the persuasive devices manifest in the political utterances made during the Mau Forest conservation debate and describe their social implications for forest conservation in Kenya.

Political speeches perform a number of rhetorical functions. They inform, persuade, manipulate, influence and control, while also serving to place the speaker in the best possible light (Durant and Lambrou, 2009). Where the speaker is a political leader, the content of a political speech can make a major difference to public opinion. In such circumstances, the choice of language is fundamental not only to encouraging the public to vote but also in persuading them to vote in a particular way. That is, the language used seeks to persuade hearers towards some particular viewpoints, beliefs or course of action. Hearers are persuaded because they believe the speaker to be fair and honest thus this largely depends on the personal character of the speaker (ethos), the emotion aroused by what the speaker says (pathos) and by the proof provided by the words (logos). Durant describes a number of persuasive devices manifest in politicians utterances. The devices include metaphor, metonymy, sound patterning, (repetition, alliteration), list of three, rhetorical questions, catch phrases and lexical choice. This study will borrow from Durant's system of describing the language features manifest in political speeches. This study will analyze the persuasive devices such as repetition, metaphor, and pronominal choice manifest in politicians' utterances on the Mau Forest conservation debate to determine their implications for environmental conservation.

Political discourse intends to enhance people's understanding of a particular issue and inform about possible solutions to the problem (Chilton (2004). However, the communicative effect of a political message does not only depend on advancing the level of understanding of the interlocutors, but it can also depend on bringing about changes in their opinion

about a particular issue. This can be achieved with the help of discourse strategies, which include a variety of linguistic devices used by interlocutors to serve the intended communicative function. This study will entail the analysis of persuasive devices in the political discourse on the Mau forest debate and the communicative function they serve.

Language can play a powerful role in resolving political related conflicts (Barasa, 2014). Using a sample of four political speeches, analyzed from a CDA perspective, the findings indicated that politicians can manipulate language to advance individual and political party ideologies which can compromise peace in the country. However, it was also observed that the mitigated language used by the national leaders in their negotiation helped to resolve the crisis on Portfolio Balance during the aftermath of the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007-2008. This study will be informed by Barasa's (2014) work in data analysis.

In view of the above studies, it can be observed that many of them address the role political discourse plays in influencing people's attitudes towards political viewpoints. The studies have indicated that language is a powerful force that shapes people's minds and society's attitudes and behavior. However, there is need to pay a more critical attention to the interrelationship between language use and conservation. Consequently, a shift in focus to the domain of conservation which trails behind the necessary dimension the world over is necessary.

Theoretical Framework

Different theories have been advanced in the study of political discourse. This study will be guided by the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough and Ruth Wodak. The examination of the strongest key words and clusters in the corpora, (archived discourses) combined with concordance analysis, will provide helpful indications of the respective stance towards forest conservation of the Mau Forest. However, it may be beneficial to examine the keyness of word-forms, lemmas, word families, and semantically/ functionally related words. By grouping key words relating to specific topics, metaphors or topoi, it will be possible to create a general impression of the presentation of forest conservation in the 2010-2014 Mau Forest Conservation Programme.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a practically-oriented form of discourse analysis aimed at addressing social problems. It seeks not merely to describe language but also to offer critical linguistic resources to those wishing to resist various forms of power. Therefore, CDA may be seen as to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden within texts.

One of the most influential practitioners of CDA is Norman Fairclough, and it is his model of language as discourse and Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) upon which this study is approached. CDA is a form of discourse analysis which uses SFL to study how formal linguistic features of text, such as vocabulary and grammar, are related to social power. The relationship between text and power is mediated by ideology. People are often unaware of this ideological mediation of power in language. Therefore, the goal of CDA may be seen as to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden within texts.

Fairclough also borrows from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This theory is concerned with how language choice enables one to convey meanings of different kinds. According to Halliday (1985, 1994), a language is a "system of making meanings". People use language to express meaning and therefore it is in understanding the theory behind the assembling of words to form a grammar that meaning can be interpreted correctly. Thus, Halliday sees language as made up of semantic units and that a functional grammar is needed to bring out the meanings of wordings. Halliday avers that this kind of analysis is functional because it is about analyzing language in use according to context. Because of SFL's social constructivist conception of language, and CDA's practical-orientation to addressing social problems, together they have been used in many spheres of social struggle. Although there has not, as yet, been much CDA work published in this area (Halliday 1992), many environmental issues involve power struggles between opposing groups, and these struggles frequently take place in, and over, language. SFL and CDA can help us become more systematically and critically aware of the language in which environmental matters are discussed. Such awareness can help us understand the ideological presuppositions of environmental texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis provides a general framework to problem-oriented social research. Every 'text' (e.g. an interview, focus group discussion, TV debate, press report, or visual symbol) is conceived as a semiotic entity, embedded in an immediate, text-internal co-text as well as intertextual and socio-political context. CDA thus takes into account the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses, as well as extra-linguistic social/sociological variables, the history and 'archaeology' of an organization, institutional frames of a specific context of situation and processes of text production, text-reception and text consumption.

Furthermore, CDA is socially and politically committed, being heavily informed by social theory

and viewing discursive and linguistic data as a social practice, both reflecting and producing ideologies in society. In this way, all CDA approaches have to be regarded not only as 'tools' but as discourse theories (Wodak & Chilton 2005; van Dijk forthcoming). CDA thus sees 'language as social practice' (Fairclough & Wodak 1997), and considers the context of language use to be crucial (Weiss & Wodak 2003).

CDA researchers are fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control, as they are manifested in language. For CDA, language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use people make of it. This explains why CDA often chooses the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyzes the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and the opportunity to improve conditions. In agreement with its Critical Theory predecessors, CDA emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary work in order to gain a proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge, in organizing social institutions or in exercising power.

Language provides a vehicle for differences in power in hierarchical social structures. Very few linguistic forms have not at some stage been pressed into the service of the expression of power by a process of syntactic or textual metaphor. CDA thus takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text, or by access to certain public spheres. It is often exactly within the genres associated with given social occasions that power is exercised or challenged. Those groups who are in control of most influential public discourses, that is symbolic elites such as politicians, journalists, scholars, teachers and writers, thus play a special role in the reproduction of dominant knowledge and ideologies in society (Van Dijk 2005). Since prejudices are not innate, but socially acquired, and since such acquisition is predominantly discursive, the public discourses of the symbolic elites are the primary source of shared ethnic prejudices and ideologies (Van Dijk, 1993). CDA theories argue that the theorization of context is constitutive for the text analysis (see Fairclough & Wodak 2007). In this way, 'context' cannot be reduced to exploring the seemingly 'objective' dimensions of the broader locution of utterances (time, space, speakers, etc.); context has to be perceived and interpreted so that speakers produce utterances they regard as adequate and hearers interpret them due to their perceptions of context and their knowledge (van Dijk, 2005). Hence, van Dijk claims

that we need to assume 'context models' which allow understanding what is said and meant.

On the other hand, a 'critical' analysis would not only be interested in accounting for what linguistic elements and processes exist in a text or set of texts but would also need to explain why and under what circumstances and consequences the producers of the text have made specific linguistic choices among several other options that a given language may provide. That is, a critical analysis takes into account absences as well as presences in the data. This justifies the use of CDA rather than purely descriptive, data driven approaches which are epistemologically inadequate in accounting for the complex linguistic choices made during the processes of production of a text. The CDA approach adopted for this study focuses on macro-structural categories (such as the specific genre) and on text-inherent categories developed in the DH approach of CDA for the analysis of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). These dimensions include inter alia strategies employed for predication, labelling, argumentation, perspectivation, and intensification/mitigation.

Each of these strategies are manifested textually through a number of linguistic indicators, such as specific lexical items to construct in-groups and out-groups, along with adjectives, attributes, metaphors, and the selection of verbs.

This study will analyze the political utterances to reveal the persuasive devices and their social implications for forest conservation. CDA will make it possible to analyze the utterances in terms of the lexical choices the speakers make and the ideologies underlying these choices. CDA will also enable the researcher to reveal how power and social relations are negotiated, performed, and produced through discourse. The researcher will give the interpretation of the pronominal choices the speakers make and how they perform the function of expressing the speakers' power to dominate and direct public debate on Mau forest conservation. This study will analyze political discourse to reveal how social views, power, identity, legitimation, and delegitimation are represented in discourse through lexical choices made by the speakers. These choices will reveal the speakers' feelings, thus, attitudes towards forest conservation. CDA therefore seeks to unveil the obscure relationships between power and discourse. CDA approaches discourse as a circular process in which social practices influence texts (written and spoken) via shaping the context and mode in which they are produced. In turn, the texts help to influence society through shaping the viewpoint of those who consume the texts (spoken or written). The current study will therefore strive to bring to light the power relations manifest in political utterances on the Mau Forest

conservation. The approach will help reveal how speakers use language to display their authority to direct and inform public viewpoint on environmental issues. That is, CDA will help the researcher explain what political leaders say and do in their use of discourse in relation to their views of the conservation debate, themselves and relationships with each other. CDA will also help the researcher in tracing the underlying attitudes from the persuasive devices manifest in political discourse on forest conservation and relating this to the people's experiences and beliefs. In sum, CDA was chosen because of its interpretive and explanatory nature. CDA goes beyond the level of description to a deeper understanding of texts and provides as far as might be possible, some kind of explanation of why a text is as it is and what it is aiming to do. CDA examines texts such as political discourse which have great influence on the people. CDA is therefore both a theory and method of analysis. CDA's notion of context embodies psychological, political, ideological, and historical components. Consequently, CDA offers an interdisciplinary procedure to this study.

In serving this function, language gives structure to experience and helps to determine our way of looking at things, so that it requires some intellectual effort to see them in any way that that which our language suggests to us. Language also serves the Interpersonal function. This function is concerned with how language reflects the attitude and opinion of speakers. The words speakers choose to use in particular contexts will be embedded with their feelings and attitudes. This study will focus on this function in the analysis of the lexical choices and persuasive devices political leaders during the Mau forest debate. Language further serves the textual function, which is concerned with how words and sentences are organized to make the text and to steer the reader's/hearers' interpretations of events and people (Eggins, 1994).

In sum, CDA will inform this study in the analysis of the politicians' language use during the Mau forest conservation debate. This analysis will reveal how the politicians view the conservation debate through their choice of words and the structure of their texts. The analysis of language use will therefore reveal the values and ideological constructs found in the politicians' discourse on Mau forest conservation. It is these values and ideological constructs that the speakers intend to share with people through discourse.

METHODOLOGY

This study will use a Qualitative research design. The design presents a qualitative analysis, comparison and interpretation of the study's findings to find a solution to significant problems in society (Glesne, 2012). Researchers have argued that the greatest strength of

qualitative research is to add understanding and insight into behaviour and attitudes. Speeches by political leaders on the 2010-2014 Mau Forest debate will be selected for analysis. Down-sampling procedure will be used to select the samples of political utterances during the 2010-2014 Mau forest restoration. Texts will be selected from the articles within 2010-2014 period of the Mau forest conservation programme. The CDA analysis will be carried out on a sample of texts from the corpus and the data analyzed using qualitative techniques. The use of particular words and phrases within the context of Mau forest restoration debate will imbue these items with hidden meanings which will in turn provide cultural and ideological information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic definition and construction of forest conservation

This section discusses how political leaders perceived and defined forest conservation. The lexical items, metaphors and expressions the political leaders used during the Mau Forest conservation debate indicate how the speakers perceived and defined the forest conservation issue. The government and other stakeholders embarked on a programme to rehabilitate the Mau Forest Complex. This programme involved the eviction of people who had encroached on the forest land for farming, charcoal making and logging. Political leaders from the Rift Valley region came out and campaigned against this programme. The forest conservation programme was turned into a political issue and it featured prominently during the electioneering periods since 2005 to date. A critical analysis of these lexical items and expressions offered insight into how the political leaders perceived and defined the forest conservation. The lexical items and expressions they used also indicate the speakers' beliefs and attitudes towards the Mau Forest conservation issue. The following are some of the ways in which the speakers defined and described the forest conservation issue.

Oppression

Different speakers referred to the Mau Forest Conservation issue as a form of oppression. The speakers used expressions which implied that the entire conservation issue was inhuman. This is illustrated by the following examples (ref Appendix C)

Sample 1

*You oppress the people- imagining Mau- does all the water
Come from Mau! (Excerpt 13 line 7)
You push people in the name of water
catchment areas... (Excerpt 14, line 6)
You push people. Are people rats and
cats...? (Excerpt 14 line 8)*

*We should bear in mind that we are
dealing with human beings, not chicken!
(Excerpt 19 line 4).*

The examples in Sample 1 indicate how the speakers perceived the forest conservation issue. The speakers' lexical choices imply that the forest conservation programme was a form of brutality and unfairness. The phrases 'push people' and 'not chicken' indicate that the conservation programme was equated to inhuman treatment of the people. This implies that the people should resist the conservation programme because of its being oppressive.

Distortion

A closer look at the political discourse on the Mau Forest reveals that the politicians viewed the conservation issue as a distortion of the reality on the ground. The speakers argued that the politicians from other ethnic communities (outsiders), who never understood the nature of the Mau Forest Complex were misleading the government in this issue. The speakers portrayed as ignorant, those advocating conservation programme. Therefore, the conservation programme is a product of ignorance and lack of knowledge.

Sample 2

*I do not know whether these days Mau
Forest stretches all the way to Nairobi...
(Excerpt 11 line 1)
Do you want to tell me that Mau Forest is
the source of Water in Ndakaini Dam? ...
(Excerpt 1 line 3)
There was proper excision of forest land,
proper survey, Proper documentation-
complete with issuance of title deeds...
(Excerpt 5 line 2)
Is Mau there? Why is it that there is no
water in Mount Kenya area? Let us get
the scientific knowledge about it...
(Excerpt 25 line 13-18).*

The examples in Sample 2 imply that the Mau Forest is not related to the drought situation in different parts of the country. The speakers argued that other regions that are not within the Mau catchment were experiencing drought and yet the people in the Mau Forest Complex were being told to move out. The speakers therefore implied that the conservation exercise was based on falsehoods. That is, the people in the forest should be free to carry on with their activities because the Mau Forest is not responsible for the drought. However, it is important to note that although the speakers' assertions are not true, they could influence the way the people view the conservation issue.

Ethnic provocation

Speakers viewed the conservation programme as a form of ethnic –based provocation and a recipe for violence. The lexical choices in the politicians' utterances show that the eviction of people from the

Mau Forest was regarded as deliberate attempt by political leaders from other ethnic communities to stir the people of Rift Valley to violence.

Sample 3

Those who do not understand the importance of peace are the ones running up and down... thinking that Rift Valley is just like any other province... (Excerpt 9 line 3).

Leaders from outside to come and dictate what the people of Rift Valley should do... are there no men and leaders in Rift Valley?... (Excerpt 14 line2-4).

Rift Valley has its own people and the people have their own leaders... (Excerpt 9 line4).

To tell us that a deadline has been set for people to be evicted by force- we will never let it happen! (Excerpt 13 line 14).

The examples in Sample 3 indicate that the political leaders viewed the conservation issue as a recipe for tribal clashes in the Rift Valley region. The speakers highlighted the fact that those calling for the eviction of people from the Mau Forest hailed from different ethnic communities, hence did not deserve to be listened to. The speakers urged the people to repulse them and rely on their own political leaders for guidance in as far as the Mau Forest issue was concerned. The use of expressions such as 'are there no men', 'leaders from outside', and 'we will never let it happen' could be interpreted to mean that the speakers were inciting their people to physically resist the conservation exercise. These assertions could reinforce, inform or even influence the people's beliefs about forest conservation.

Blackmail

Some speakers perceived the conservation issue as an excuse to settle political scores and ultimately gain political mileage. A closer look at the utterances indicates that the speakers felt that those advocating for the eviction of people from the Mau Forest were insincere. The forest issue had been turned into blackmail. The Mau Forest was being used as an excuse to harass Rift Valley people and their leaders.

Sample 4

Ndakaini Dam is drying up...do you want to tell me that the Mau Forest is the source of the water in Ndakaini Dam? (Excerpt 1 line2).

There was proper excision of forest land, proper survey, proper documentation... (Excerpt5line1-2)

Lake Naivasha- is it not dry? Have they queried about it... (Excerpt 13 line 5).

Forests are burning all over...trees are being felled, they keep on shouting Mau Mau Mau... (Excerpt14 line 9-11).

It has been said that Sondu Miriu is drying up because of Mau....I want us to be very sincere... Let us be honest... is Mau there? (Excerpt 25 line 12-13).

The examples indicate that the speakers perceive the Mau Forest issue as an excuse to push for the eviction of people. That is, the political leaders' belief that the destruction of the Mau Forest is not related to the drought in other parts of the country is emphasized. They cite Lake Naivasha, Sondu Miriu and Ndakaini Dams which had been reported to have recorded receding water levels as prove of their claims. This means that those advocating for the removal of people from the Mau Forest had other motives other than conserving the Mau Forest. The political leaders are urging their people not to accept the view that the destruction of the Mau Forest is related to drought.

CONCLUSION

Insights from the linguistic data analysis have revealed that political leaders perceived the Mau Forest Conservation programme in bad light. The speakers used words, phrases, metaphors, and expressions with negative connotation to either refer to or describe the forest conservation issue. The speakers defined the forest conservation issue as oppression, distortion, blackmail and ethnic provocation/animosity. These definitions and perceptions repeated over time could easily become the community's shared perception and definition of the forest conservation issue and thus derailing the efforts to conserve the Mau Forest. However, research has shown that politicians use language to persuade their hearers to accept the viewpoints they espouse for political mileage. This has been described as double-speak. It is therefore important to point out that the political leaders' language use could be a strategy to solicit and consolidate political support from the ignorant masses at the expense of the Mau Forest conservation programme. Consequently, political discourse could propagate environmental illiteracy and the degradation of the Mau Forest could go on unchecked.

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