



THEMATIC CHOICE AS A DISCURSIVE FORMATION USED TO CREATE SOCIO-POLITICAL DOMINANCE IN KENYAN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES BETWEEN 1992 AND 2010

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Abstract

Speech that is made up of a group of statements that belong to the same discursive formation is referred to as knowledge. Participants in such a discourse manipulate it to achieve their desired goals. A conversational construction is made up of a number of statements that have conditions of existence. Thematic choice is a discursive formation that addresses the topic of discussion. It is linked to coercion. Whereas language is generally intended to be communicative, it has, sometimes done more than that due to manipulations. This paper examines thematic choice as a discursive formation that was used by Kenyan parliamentarians during debates to create socio-political dominance. The objective was: To identify and explain how discursive formations are presented in language used by Kenyan parliamentarians to create socio-political dominance. Various sources of literature have been reviewed in the following areas: ideology, parliamentary proceedings and political dominance, the power in language and discursive formations, and the theoretical framework. The study used descriptive research design. By using purposive sampling, the data was collected from the Hansard dating from 1992 to 2010. Data was analysed using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), a theory about how text is constructed. The study identified how thematic choice in each of the utterances was used to create socio-political dominance. The research found out that thematic choice, had impact on the language that parliamentarians used.

Keywords: *Thematic choice, Discursive formations, legitimization, Delegitimization.*

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the discursive formations of language employed in the creation of identities to bring about socio-political identities and dominance. This discourse is a sub – type of political discourse that is characterised by debates that have exclusive linguistic features (van Dijk, 2002). It should be noted that during the debates, other features of discourse are used; these include among others, implicit expressions (Bayley, 2004). Discursive formations are the additional structures that determine language use and are made possible by factors such as the historical production, loosely structured combinations of concerns, concepts, themes and types of statements. Though they are loosely structured, they are sufficient enough to determine differences that exist in utterances (Foucault, 1989). Discursive formations or practice are unknown rules that are controlled by the time and space for an established era, and a given public, economic, environmental or linguistic space (Perezalonso, 2009).

Thematic choice is a discursive formation that addresses the topic of discussion. It is linked to coercion. A conversational construction is made up of a number of statements that have conditions of existence, (Foucault, 2002). In the study, thematic choice was considered as (de)legitimization. The speakers constantly try to establish the right to be obeyed by legitimizing their actions. The members of parliament on either side of the house always try to legitimise their actions but at the same time delegitimise the opposing side. Quite often the arguments in parliament are presented along concepts and abstract principles that are fronted by the speakers with the aim of creating dominance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discourse and Parliamentary Language

Discourse is a wide term that refers to whole varieties of meanings (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 1998). This is not just a meaning in a text or an utterance, but it is finding many meanings that can be decoded from a text. It is a process of social interaction (Fairclough, 1989). Discourse can also be defined as an exercise that characterises the world by demonstrating it, creating and assembling it in meaning (Fairclough, 1992). From this definition, discourse is a way of speaking and writing about information, societal practice that mirrors and produces the structuring of the area. Language is viewed as a window into people's minds and also as a discursive resource which individuals utilise to perform various discursive functions (Chalebois, 2010). Discourse can also be that system of thought that is systematically constructed in a discussion through which power relations produce speaking subjects (Foucault, 2003).

Politicians are not known to be consistent. Quite often they present arguments geared toward endearing themselves to either the powers that be or, retrospectively, toward supporting their side of the political divide. The varied linguistic strategies applied in debates and speeches by members of parliament have a great impact on the laws as well as the citizenry of land.



Parliaments are institutions in which members debate legislative proposals and scrutinize the operations of government through interrogative questioning which at times appears negative (Jakaza, 2013). Parliamentary proceedings have a strict code of conduct that should be observed during business (Ilie, 2009).

2.2 The Power in Language and Discursive Formations

A discourse is a group of statements that belong to the same discursive formations. In these formations, one can describe a number of statements and define some form of regularities, order, position and correlation. Discursive formations have statements that refer to the same objects, are enunciated in the same way and share a common system of conceptualizations (Foucault, 2002). Parliamentary debates fall under this category of discursive formations.

The context of what is said matters because the same thing said in different contexts can be either acceptable or not. Freedom of speech should be approached as a value detached and independent from the actual content of speech (Chomsky, 1980). Expressions such as ‘kumbavu’- a foolish person and ‘maviya kuku’- chicken excrement, once used by a Kenyan President, come out as a touch of humour but if someone else said them, they would be considered abusive and would elicit negative feelings and reactions. This is because they are actually words of insolence. Language is influential and instrumental in issues of power. Influential power inclines people either to behave in certain ways or makes people adopt opinions or attitudes without exerting force on them (Mey, 1985). Members of parliament use language to express their views during debates. This is positioning and it is a linguistic strategy that is employed when one group of people takes a stand to make the other group of people to do what it intends to do. The discussions will take this form, where one side tries to be better than the other. This involves manipulative application of the language. This is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control the others. It is based on the use of indirect speech acts, that is focused (Halliday, 1978).

2.3 Thematic Choice and Legitimization

Thematic choice is a discursive formation that addresses the topic of discussion. It is linked to coercion and it is about the speaker establishing the right to be obeyed. This can be observed in the presentation of arguments, ideologies and self (Chilton & Schaffner, 1997). In the debates the members of the dominant group, would legitimise their actions. Further, legitimisation is the use of language to justify certain actions and portrayal of others as being wrong (van Leeuwen 1996). Dominant groups advance a style of thought and practice in order to replicate and legitimise their dominance (van Dijk, 1997). Language is used to present ideologies; shared self- definitions of groups that allow the members to organise their public practices in relation to other groups (van Dijk, 1997). Ideology establishes itself more successfully by being implied rather than encouraging domination and abuse overtly (Fairclough, 1989). To do this, discourse is founded on conventions that are treated as common sense but are essentially “common sense assumptions in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power” (Uchenna, 2012).

The more powerful group dominates the rest. Those who are dominated may resist, accept, condone, and comply with the other group. The dominant group strives to legitimate their control over others (Lukes, 1986). Dominant groups are integrated in law, rules and habits. Power can take several forms such as class domination (Gramsci, 1971).

Political discourse has a role in enactment and legitimisation of power and dominance which is evident in political text and talk (Wilson, 1990). In the present study, text is the Hansard and talk is represented by the utterances from the debates in parliamentary proceedings. Legitimization is the use of language to justify ones actions and to present others as wrong. Participants in speech would strive to legitimize their actions through the use of certain strategies (Reyes, 2011, van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Legitimization in political discourse deserves special attention because through speech, political leaders justify their agenda.

2.4 Resistance to Domination

Power needs resistance and would not be operational without it. Resistance stands in implacable opposition to power. When resistance involves people fighting back in defence of freedom and humanity, it is good. On the other hand it can also be bad. There are actions which undermine, question or challenge authority. An act against power is performed by someone in a subordinate position in relation to power. In the current study the subordinate are the opposition while the superordinate are the government. Resistance therefore is an act by the subordinate. It is usually in response to power and it challenges authority. Resistance has a possibility of undermining power. Resistance can be a public challenge against power and this makes it confrontational. These correspond to three forms of domination; material, status and ideological. Public resistance is open revolt and petitions and is usually against material domination. Counter ideologies are against ideological domination.



3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design. This was appropriate in the study of human behaviour because it uncovers deeper understanding of such behavior (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method allowed the researcher to gather the required information. The methodology helps a researcher to collect data in the form of words (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done through the study of extracts from Hansard. Data was collected from extracts of parliamentary debates in Kenya. This information was from the Hansard. Relevant excerpts that had language that exhibited socio-political dominance were used. A summary of the identified utterances are in the following table:

The utterances that were identified fulfilled the following criteria of choice:

Table 1: Principle Criteria of Choice

Principle Criteria of Choice													
UTT	H/S	Pers	Dom	Inti	Gloat	Dim	Div	Ster	Nepo	Abu	Eva	Coe	Verb
1													
2													
4													
6													
7													
12													
13													
15													
17													

Source: Researcher Generated

Key:	H/S-	Hate speech	Ster-	Stereotypes
	Pers-	Persuasion	Nepo-	Nepotism
	Dom-	Dominance	Abu-	Abuse
	Inti-	Intimidation	Eva-	Evasion
	Gloat-	Gloating	Coe-	Coercion
	Dim-	Diminutive	Verb-	Verbosity
	Div-	Division (Economic and Political)		

4. Discussion

In the following utterances, the speakers are constantly trying to establish the right to be obeyed. They do this through their arguments while participating in debates. The members of the dominant group would attempt to legitimise their actions

Utterance 1

Prof. Saitoti: I am surprised that the Hon. Member did not take the trouble to read the details which are contained in an article published by 'The Standard' newspaper... There is an extremely detailed position here... this article gives the historical perspective... I want honourable members to know that similar agreements have been signed by Tanzania and Ghana so we are following examples of what is being done elsewhere... I thought Hon. Members would be happier if gold is exported... (Hansard: 22nd April 1992).

The utterance was a ministerial statement on Goldenberg International. Hon. Malebe on a point of order mentioned that Goldenberg International was swindling the government through export of gold worth Ksh. 185,000,000 million by being given the monopoly to buy and export the gold. The speaker attempts to legitimise what the government did. He justifies the action by giving a detailed historical background to the whole issue. He does this by saying: "When we first put gold under export compensation... promised."

Utterance 2

Mr. A. H. Ahmed: The government does not have plans to establish a Lake Transport System to connect the fifteen Islands in Mbita Constituency with the mainland. Currently the Kenya Railways Corporation operates a limited service in the area with few vessels but the service is unprofitable and has to be heavily subsidised... However, anyone with adequate resources is free to establish a ferry or boat service for hire from any of the 15 Islands... (Hansard: 2nd November 1993).



The speaker legitimises what they in government have decided to do. He says that the government will not establish a Lake Transport System because it is not economical; the limited services by Kenya Railway Corporation are not profitable and that is why the government will not get into it. This explanation makes it clear that it is the government that decides and they have taken their stand which brings about the creation of socio- political dominance.

Utterance 3

Mr Awori: KANU will soon forward a cheque worth kshs. 23,410,912 the party borrowed from the government to carry out elections between 1985/86 and 1986/87 and not kshs 27 million as alleged... as soon as possible... At the time, the party and the government were one... **(Hansard: 22nd June 1995).**

The ruling party was strong during the 1960's but weakened with time. The leaders needed to consolidate their power, both politically and economically. Thus the party borrowed money from the government. The question was on the amount actually borrowed and if or when it would be paid. The fact that the speaker says that the party and the government were one, amounts to abuse of public position by the speaker and other members in government. He legitimises the action of government by stating that at the time KANU and government were one thing.

Utterance 4

Mr. Wako: The independence of the judiciary is ensured in the constitution of ... The members of the judiciary are under duty to decide cases without improper influences, inducement, pressure or threats or interferences... before the courts because such matters are *subjudice*.
(Hansard: 10th April 1997)

The speaker evades giving an answer by quoting authority; the law. The speaker legitimises the position of the government by stating the obvious information about the constitution of Kenya. He is wordy as he goes on to explain what the government is doing in terms of the independence of the judiciary. He stops any further debate on the issue by stating that the matter is in court and cannot be discussed. This is a show of how much power and control the leadership has.

Utterance 5

Mr. Angwenyi: Is the honourable member from some part of Meru in order to say that in the Department of Defence, they now pay one for supplying air? Have they ever paid him for air? **(Hansard: 15th April 1998).**

This utterance was addressing corruption in the country. During the presidential speech, members were collectively asked to help curb the menace. There had been accusations of how cabinet ministers were able to organise to import maize within an unusually short period of time. The implication was that the ministers used dubious and unethical means to do so. There was corruption in government and the opposition speaker takes the chance to point this out. This accusation is an opportunity to deligitimize the government of the day. In response, the speaker from the government side shows dominance in refusing to reply to the accusation on corruption and chooses to launch an attack on the origin of the other speaker. He uses confrontational language that is meant to intimidate the opposition.

Utterance 6

Mr. Mwiraria: The Government's position is that the currency notes and coins bearing the portrait of former President Moi will continue to circulate as legal tender... when we took over Government, we found that bank notes printed in 1978 bearing the portrait of the first President of the Republic of Kenya were still kept... we are completely at liberty to continue printing the late President Kenyatta's notes, if we so wish. **(Hansard: 23rd July 2003).**

This utterance is an act of legitimisation of the actions of the government. The speaker's last statement: "...we are completely at liberty to continue printing the late President Kenyatta's notes, if we so wish" expresses how dominating the government can be.

Utterance 7

Mr. Tarus: The Government will not halt military exercises in Samburu range as it is government trust land availed for military training back to pre- independent times.
(Hansard: 20th May 2004).

There is legitimisation of the speakers group or position and action when he states that the Government will not put a stop to the military exercises in Samburu range. He says that the government has taken a position on the matter and it will not amend



this stand. He uses rhetorics in an attempt to convince the listeners. This speech implies that the speaker and government do not empathise with the suffering people and so it creates socio-political dominance. Those in leadership will not act as expected by the masses. The government’s decision is final and they will not adjust their plans to suit the people and alleviate their suffering.

Utterance 8

Mr.Kingi: I am not aware that the government’s spokesman was escorted by a convoy of eight vehicles and motorcycle outriders during his visit to Kisumu on 4th April 2006. What is referred to as a convoy was, in fact transport for twenty four local and international journalist who had accompanied the public communications secretary or the government spokesman to a tour of projects in Kisumu. There was no extra expenditure in respect to the visit other than the normal routine expense by the District Security Intelligence Committee (DSIC).
(Hansard: 13th June 2006).

In the utterance there is legitimisation of the government’s action by exonerating it from the accusation of being extravagant in funding the expensive tour of Kisumu by the government spokesman. Thespeaker uses persuasion to try and convince the listeners that they should not imagine that a lot of expenses were incurred during the visit. He claims that the tour did not involve luxurious spending. This is an attempt to legitimise the government’s action and so bring about socio-political dominance. The speaker’s statement shows how a lot of resources were used during the visit. Since the government is in power it can use all the means as it deems right during such visits. Theopposition may find this wasteful. In this way, the government creates dominance.

Utterance 9

Mr.Ojode: ... What I was saying is that heavily funded Ministries are given to people from a particular region... If you look at the eight provinces, the Provincial Police Officers (PPOs), six are from one particular region...
Mr.Maore: I think it is only fair when the mover is citing his examples, to be balanced. He should cite the examples of Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), the Managing Director and the Chairman. He should also cite the Ministry of Planning and National Development when Prof. Anyang’- Nyong’o was the Minister. **(Hansard: 12th September 2007).**

There is discrimination and favouritism. The utterance brings up aspects of superiority of a certain group of people and creates hatred. The listeners are being incited to take action. There is delegitimization, where the utterance shows opposition to what political actors might want to present as the legitimate case. The function of this strategy is accusing those in authority of not doing what they should be doing (Chilton, 2004). The speaker dominates as he delegitimises the operations of the government.

This refers to the topic under discussion, delegitimization of government’s actions got from the speaker’s words: “What I was saying is that heavily funded Ministries are given to people from a particular region.” The opposition member wants the other members to take note that there is a certain region that is being favoured by the government when it comes to employment. The member is therefore criticising the actions of government and those in powerful positions. The delegitimization is further expressed in the examples that the member cites. This is a form of incitement of the members to protest against the apparent nepotism that is being practised by the government.

Legitimation is seen in the counter attack by a member on the government side when he said: “I think it is only fair when the mover is citing his examples, to be balanced. He should cite the examples of Kenya Commercial Bank...the Ministry of Planning and National Development when Prof. Anyang’- Nyong’o was the Minister.” The speaker tries to justify what the government did by accusing the opposition of committing the same mistakes. This utterance is used by the government side to delegitimise the opposition members especially on the manner in which the latter worked when they were in government.

Table 2: Summary of Legitimization and Delegitimization Usage

THEMATIC CHOICE		
UTTERANCES	LEGITIMIZATION	DELEGITIMIZATION
UTT 1	✓	-
UTT 2	✓	-
UTT 3	✓	-
UTT 4	✓	-
UTT 5	✓	-
UTT 6	✓	-



UTT 7	✓	-
UTT 8	✓	-
UTT 9	✓	✓

Source: Researcher Generated

5. Summary and Findings

This paper presents the backdrop of the study which is premised on the following research objectives; To identify and explain how thematic choice as a discursive formation is in language used by Kenyan parliamentarians to create socio-political dominance. There is a detailed literature review regarding the study. The elements therein discussed include thematic choice as a discursive formation.

The research problem was that politically elected leaders use the immunity that they enjoy to manipulate language to create dominance. Members of parliament used explicit and implicit forms in order to coerce others to support, embrace or reject some people. Using language in this way created socio-political dominance. The study examined how thematic choice was used by parliamentarians in dominance creation.

It was found out that in their endeavour to create social political dominance the members of parliament in Kenya used the thematic choice as a discursive formation, in which they either legitimized or delegitimized other members of parliament and their deeds. The study established that speakers' language was bent on legitimization or delegitimization of the actions of the different groups in the national assembly; the MPs legitimize their positions and delegitimize that of their opponents.

Conclusion

This study set to examine thematic choice in language used by parliamentarians during parliamentary debates to create socio-political dominance. The research revealed that between 1992 and 2010, the Kenyan Parliament turned very vibrant as members freely enjoyed the freedom of expression especially after the repeal of the section 2A of the then Kenyan Constitution. It was evident that the ideology that the members ascribed to had a great impact on the kind of language they used during debates. They sometimes went overboard to create socio-political dominance. They strive for dominance brought about rigidity and members would try anything to influence the others to accept their opinions.

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