



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Kenyatta's Eighth Presidential Address on the Corona Virus Pandemic on 6th June, 2020

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Abstract: Language plays a crucial role in communication in any given speech. This paper examines the linguistic choices used in President Uhuru Kenyatta's speech as well as the covert ideology of the same, enshrined in his eighth address on the Corona virus pandemic. In carrying out the analysis, Norman Fairclough's three dimensional Analytical models of Critical Discourse Analysis theory was adopted. Following the model, the speech was subjected to description (text analysis), interpretation (processing/analysis) and explanation (social practice and analysis). The selected corpus' ideological and persuasive components are assessed, thus revealing Kenyatta's linguistic choices. Power relations depicted in the language used are also analysed. The results of the analysis revealed that the speech was meant to give factual reasons why a number of the measures put in place to curb the spread of the pandemic had to be retained. The ideologies revealed were mainly those of nationalism, collective responsibility in fighting the pandemic and improvement of the country's economy. The analysis also revealed power relations between the president and his subjects. The researcher recommends that a similar study be carried out using CDA models by vanDijk and Wodak.

Keywords: Critical discourse Analysis, pandemic, ideology, power relations, linguistic choices, presidential address

Abbreviations: CDA-Critical Discourse Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

This study falls in the realm of political discourse. Politics pertains to the process of struggling for power (Bayram, 2010). It is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this process, language plays a crucial role, for every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. It is one of the vital tools that politicians use in order to shape the political thoughts of the electorates with the aim of selling their ideologies to them. Chimbarange, Takavarasha, and Kombe (2013), are of the view that the main purpose of politicians is to persuade their audience of the validity of their political claims. The ensuing political influence flows from the employment of resources that shape the beliefs and behavior of others. The above implies that politicians make efforts to convince the electorates to discard their political ideologies and hold on to theirs. A political speech could be defined as a speech associated with either struggle for power or maintenance/control of it. It is diverse because it encompasses the different forms of speeches that the politicians deliver at political forums. A presidential address given during an economic or health crisis can be taken as an example of a political speech. The aim of such a speech is not to win votes but to spell out the commitment of the government towards resolving the crisis at hand. In such a speech the president uses language to assure the citizens of his/her commitment in protecting them from the adverse effects of the crisis. Language in this context can be seen more as an embodiment of ideologies than an instrument of persuasion. The president had given other addresses during the pandemic but this speech was purposively chosen based on the situation in the country at the time. The pandemic had been in the country for about three months since the declaration of the first case. Since then, various measures had been put in place by the government to combat the spread of the virus. However, the number of cases was rising daily. The speech was given at a time when many Kenyans expected quite some major relaxations on the measures that had been undertaken to mitigate the crisis. It therefore came against a backdrop of high expectations many of which were not

met in the manner Kenyans had anticipated. This paper aims to carry out a critical discourse analysis of President Uhuru Kenyatta's eighth presidential address during the Corona virus pandemic. This is done with a view to uncovering the ideologies and power relations underlying the speech and bringing out his plans for fighting the pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wodak and Fairclough (1995a, 1996) are of the view that language as a practice of creating hegemony, power and dominance is being used in a society. It seems to be a complete reflection of social practices like a mirror. The types of language used among the members of society reveal the social relations like the communication of a director of a company with a clerk or peon would clearly draw a line and the linguistic choice of director would reveal his/her hegemonic attitude. Historical perspective of discourse plays vital role in getting the meanings of the text. Every text carries certain historical perspectives and contexts which clarify the meanings in that particular context.

Nagham Ali's (2018) research makes use of Norman Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model to do the critical discourse analysis of Trump's Inaugural Address. Ali (2018) analyses Trump's speech both at micro-level and macro-level. In other words, his research actually describes, interprets, and explains Trump's speeches using the three dimensional method as given by Norman Fairclough; besides, the research also critically exposes the discursive strategies, such as repetition, the use of pronoun 'we', and the usage of future tense in order to exploit the emotions and opinions of common Americans. The employment of Fairclough's model is quite helpful in exposing the power mechanisms operating within discourse. Ali's study was based on an inaugural speech whose context is quite different from a speech given during a crisis such as the analysis the current paper undertakes. However, Ali's study sheds light on the identification of the discursive strategies used in the speech which is beneficial to the current study.

Wang, J. (2010) carried out a critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's speeches. He concluded that President Obama used simple language which was easy and colloquial as well as made use of modal verbs, tense and first person pronouns. These enabled him to persuade the public to accept and support his policies. The current study also employs CDA but the speech analysed was given in the context of a crisis.

Horváth, J. (2009) used CDA to analyse President Obama's political discourse. The analysis of the speech was done based on the outline. The analysis revealed the persuasive strategies used as well as the ideological components of the speech. This lends credence to the current study which analyses President Kenyatta's speech using CDA according to the structure of the speech.

2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) has offered educational researchers ways of investigating language use within social contexts. By questioning the taken-for-grantedness of language and enabling explorations of how texts represent the world in particular ways according to particular interests, CDA provides opportunities to consider the relationships between discourse and society, between text and context, and between language and power (Fairclough, 2001b).

Fairclough's Model and Analytical Framework has been employed for this study. Rodgers et al. (2005) cited in Mirzaee & Hamidi (2012) believe that Fairclough's analytic framework includes three levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practice, and the socio-cultural practice. In other words, each of these discursive events has three proportions: (i) It is a spoken or written text, (ii) it is an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of texts, and (iii) it is a part of social practice. The analysis of the text consists of the study of the language structures produced in a discursive event-an analysis of the discursive reproduction of the texts. Finally, the analysis of socio-cultural practice consists of an investigation of what is happening in a particular socio-cultural framework. Fairclough's second dimension, based on Rodgers et al discursive practice, involves the analysis of the process of production, interpretation, and consumption. This dimension is concerned with how people interpret and reproduce or transform texts. The third dimension, socio-cultural practice, is concerned with issues of power. Analysis of this dimension includes exploration of the ways in which discourses operate in various domains of society" and the result of the combination of second and third dimension is text that is the first one here. In fact, CDA for Fairclough is concerned with the investigation of the relation between two assumptions about language use: that language use

is both socially shaped and socially shaping. He bases this idea on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL). According to Fairclough (1995), through the notion of multi-functionality of language in texts, he operationalizes the theoretical assumption that texts and discourses are socially constitutive: "Language use is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and beliefs".

CDA specifically considers how language works within institutional and political discourses as well as specific discourses in order to uncover overt or more often, covert inequalities in social relationships. Language use in speech and writing is seen as a social practice, which 'implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). Thus, in this two-way relationship, discourse is considered to be socially constitutive as well as socially shaped. Since discourses are so influential, they can help to produce and reproduce unequal power relations between different ethnicities, social classes, genders, ages, and professional groups.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted Fairclough's Three-dimensional model of CDA for analysis. The speech analysed was delivered at State House in Kenya by President Uhuru Kenyatta on 6th June, 2020 and it lasted about thirty minutes. The address was the eighth one and was given about three months into the corona virus pandemic in Kenya. The speech was downloaded through the internet. It was chosen for analysis because it doesn't follow the usual type of speech during normal times and thus it uncovers a distinguished form of language use during times of national/international crisis. The address also came at a time when many Kenyans expected a relaxation of the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus. However, the relaxation did not come in the manner many Kenyans had envisaged.

The analysis was qualitative in nature done according to the structure of the speech and the contents analysed using CDA as mentioned above.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 30 points speech was subjected to analysis using qualitative approach. The analysis was guided by Fairclough's three dimensional model -description, interpretation and explanation described in the theoretical underpinnings section. The analysis was done according to the structure and content of the speech.

4.1. Recap of Measures Taken to Curb the Spread of the Pandemic

The first two points dwelt on reminding Kenyans of the measures the government had taken to mitigate the spread of the virus in the country and reflections on what could be done at the moment. This conforms to the fact that discourse is historical and history helps people to see where they have come from, where they are and where they are going. The reminder further helps to assure Kenyans of the government's commitment towards protecting them.

Fellow Kenyans,

1. *On the 27th March, 2020 we announced a nationwide dusk-to dawn curfew. Then on the 5th of April, 2020 we augmented it by announcing the Cessation of Movement into and out of a number of areas. Later on, more measures were announced to contain the havoc visited upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. Given this trajectory, and the fact that this crisis requires a long term strategy, I took time to reflect on "...What must be Done". If we lift the cessation of movement ban, how will this help us fight the Pandemic? And if we do NOT, how will the ban affect our economy, especially, the micro business enterprises and those who derive their livelihoods from them?*

The use of the phrase 'fellow Kenyans depicts the ideology of nationalism as it depicts the president as one among the citizens being addressed. This helps to appeal to the audience and make them receptive to the speech since the president has not distanced himself from them. The use of the personal pronoun 'we' and 'us' implies inclusiveness meaning the president was not acting alone in spelling out measures to curb the spread of the virus but was working in consultation with others, probably experts. The power relation between the president and his subjects is depicted when he uses

the pronoun 'I' to imply that being the leader, he thought of what could be done. The rhetorical questions used by the president prepares the audience for the dilemma spelt out in the next point of the speech.

4.2. Appeal to Experts, the Dilemma and Possible Scenarios

The third to the eighth point dwelt on the appeal to experts, the dilemma faced and possible scenarios. The president turned to the experts to find answers to the questions earlier posed. The power relation depicted is between the president and the experts. The experts may be said to be powerful since the president sought answers from them. This depicts the president as wise since he doesn't want to act on his own without expert advice and shields him from blame since the expectations of many at the time were not met.

3. *To answer these questions, I turned to our Brain Trust, made up of the finest doctors, research scientists, and public practitioners for counsel. And I must admit that opinion was divided on how we are to advance against this VIRUS.*

The mention of **divided opinion** is a phrase that hints to the fact that the issue of relaxing the measures was not an easy one and the expectations would not be met in the manner envisaged.

4. *With these two viewpoints on the table, I was not dealing with a RIGHT and a WRONG: I was caught in-between two RIGHTS. Those who want to open up are RIGHT, and those opposed to opening up are also RIGHT. And this clash of two RIGHTS placed me on the 'Horns of a DILEMMA'.*

The use of the pronoun 'I' in the above excerpt depicts the president as powerful and implies self responsibility. As the leader the buck rests with him and he has to make the final decision with the best interest of the country at heart. That is the reason for the awkward situation he was in at the time when the disease was still spreading and yet there was a desire to open up the country.

Fellow Kenyans,

8. *Truth be told, if we had not taken the STRINGENT measures we did in March 2020, the rate of infections would have peaked to 800,000 people by July 30th 2020. And if one infected person has potential to infect two people, this number would have hit 2.4 million people in 21 days. By the end of august, 75,000 Kenyans would have died from this virus. But because of the early interventions we took, we have recorded only 2,600 infections and 83 deaths.*

In the above excerpt, the president lauds the measures taken by giving possible worst case scenarios if nothing had been done. The use of statistics cements the point made by the president. This depicts the ideology of commitment towards protecting Kenyans from the peril of the virus and also prepares them to accept the measures in place and any more that may need to be effected.

4.3. Possible Worst Case Scenarios

Points 9-11 of the speech presented the worst case scenarios according to the experts. The excerpt below repeatedly makes use of the 'if clause' which is a conditional clause. This is done to clearly show that relaxing the measures at the moment would lead to a worse situation in the country.

9. *If this is the worst case scenario, I wanted to know what the other scenarios looked like. If we put in place all the necessary interventions and relaxed them by only 20%, what would this look like? 10. According to the experts standing behind me, relaxing the interventions by 20% would lead to 200,000 infections and 30,000 deaths by December 2020. 11. Further, if we relax the interventions by 40%, the infections will peak in November 2020 with 300,000 infected and 40,000 deaths. And if we relax them by 60%, the pandemic will peak in October with 450,000 infections and 45,000 deaths.*

The use of statistics especially the mention of the large number of deaths further helped to create a clear picture in the minds of Kenyans for them to see the danger of relaxing the measures in place. This declaration prepared the listeners for the pronouncements that followed which did not meet their expectations. The reference to the experts by the president cushions him from blame as he attributes his decision to the experts.

4.4. Expert Advice on What Must be Done Before Relaxing the Measures

The power relation between the president and the experts is depicted in the opening statement of point no.14. The experts are seen as powerful in this context as they have influenced the president's decision. The thresholds spelt out by the experts had not been reached in Kenya and so lifting the restrictions was not a possible action to take at the time. That the country needed time to reach the required threshold was very clear at this point in the speech.

14. According to the professionals standing behind me, the irreducible minimum for lifting the restrictions has three thresholds. One, to open up, the infections must have been contained and headed downwards. 15. Two, our health care system must be prepared sufficiently to take on a surge in infections. It must not be overwhelmed at any one point during the pandemic. Access to testing, isolation and quarantine must be a bare minimum. Three, capacity for surveillance and contact tracing must be in place.

4.5. The President's Directives

In view of the aforesaid, the president gave his directives relaxing a few of the measures, not as many had expected. The relaxed measures are shown in the expert below. The power relation between the president and his subjects is shown in the use of the words 'order,' 'direct,' and the use of the modal 'shall.'

*24. Because of this, and fully cognizant of the irreducible minimum given by our experts, and in keeping with the advice of the National Security Council; I hereby **DIRECT** and **ORDER** as follows:*

*I. That the cessation of movement into and out of the Eastleigh Area of Nairobi and the specific limitations in force with respect to the Mombasa Old Town Area that is currently in force, **shall** lapse at 4:00 a.m. on 7th of June, 2020. II. That in view of the successful containment of the disease in the Counties of Kilifi and Kwale, the cessation of movement into and out of the two Counties that is currently in force, **shall** lapse at 4:00 a.m. on 7th of June, 2020.*

4.6. The President's Commitment Towards Protecting the Country's Economy

Points 25-28 show the commitment of the head of state towards protecting the economy in the midst of fighting the pandemic. The president stated the actual financial aid given to cushion the economy.

*25. Recognizing that the negative impact of COVID-19 is not limited to health care, my Administration has made targeted interventions to protect our economy. 26. At the outset of this pandemic, **my administration injected KSh. 216 Billion** back into the Economy through tax refunds, rebates and waivers. In the second phase we have further **rolled-out Ksh. 53.7 Billion** under the 8-point stimulus package to reinvigorate our Economy. 27. And on Madaraka day, I announced that a total of **Ksh 2 billion would be injected into the hotel industry** to cushion them from the effects of this pandemic. Modalities of how these resources will be shared are to be released next week. 28. Finally, I wish to assure each and every Kenyan that I shall do all that is necessary to limit the negative effects of COVID-19 on our People, Economy and Way of Life. Rest assured, my Administration will restore our lost livelihoods, our lost opportunities and our lost wealth.*

The above excerpt depicts the ideology of good governance and protection of the country's economy. The president also assures Kenyans of protection against the negative effects of the virus. As a leader, it is upon him to protect the people he governs.

4.7. Ending

The president ends his speech by appealing to the collective responsibility of all Kenyans in fighting the disease. This is done through the use of pronouns 'we' and 'our' which are inclusive and puts the president in the same group as the citizens. He does not distance himself from the citizens and this makes his appeal acceptable. This shows solidarity and unity of purpose in fighting the pandemic. The disease is referred to metaphorically as an enemy to be slain. He finally appeals to religion by wishing Kenyans and Kenya God's blessings.

*30. Permit me to close by saying that this Disease is beatable if **we** work together; listen to and apply the regulations, guidelines and protocols issued by the Ministry of Health; and keep **our** eyes **on slaying the enemy. Thank You and God Bless You; and God Bless Kenya.***

5. CONCLUSION

The presidential speech was mainly informative rather than persuasive given the context was that of a health crisis. The features of Kenyatta's eighth address on the pandemic can be summarized as follows: He began with a recap of the measures taken since the pandemic began in order to put things in perspective. Since the expectations were high that the measures would be relaxed, it was important to consider expert opinion on the matter and present worst case scenarios. The phrases 'Brain Trust,' 'experts,' and 'professionals' were used in the speech to show solidarity and unity of purpose. The president showed that he was not working alone by presenting the expert advice on what needed to be done before relaxing the measures given the situation at the time. In line with the advice, the president then gave his directives and expressed his commitment towards protecting the economy. This he did by spelling out the actual financial figures given by the government to cushion the economy. He ended by appealing to collective responsibility of Kenyans in fighting the virus by following the measures put in place. The use of pronouns 'we,' 'our' and 'us' along with the repetition of the phrase 'fellow Kenyans' shortened the distance between the president and the audience and helped make his appeal acceptable. Through the choice of language, the president calmly and with factual information presented his points and managed to win the support of Kenyans without causing tension despite not relaxing the measures as many had anticipated. This research will contribute to the field of CDA and enable many CDA analysts to draw upon the current research assignment in carrying out further research works.

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