



## The Power of Words in Political Discourses of the General Election Campaigns in Kenya

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### Abstract

This paper examines the power of words in political campaign discourses in Kenyan media. The study focuses on the several meanings of concepts employed by politicians in the run-up to the general elections of August 2022. Discursive practices and linguistic tactics are employed in discourses to achieve a particular political, social, psychological or linguistic goal. Critical theories of language see the use of language as a form of social practice. Critical discourse analysis claims that major social and political processes and movements have a partly linguistic and partly social and political character. Social relations of power are linguistic and discursive in nature. They are exercised and negotiated in discourse. The study utilised Mitchel Foucault's approaches to political discourse and Norman Fairclough's critical approaches to discourse analysis. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis was employed in the study. First is the analysis of text; words are a part of the community, and texts contain interpretation. Secondly, language is viewed as a discursive practice, which is the production or the constitution of text and, finally, the analysis of language as a social practice, which includes the analysis of norms. The study sought to contribute to studies dealing with the discursive construction of power and ideology in political discourses. The study demonstrates that Kenyans do not vote independently; rather, they are persuaded to vote through the power exerted by the rhetoric of the politicians and the professional media practices that assist their presentation.

**Key terms:** Critical discourse, ideology, political discourse, power, words.

## INTRODUCTION

Words have energy and power. They can destroy and create. A life can be transformed forever with as little as a single phrase or an uplifting word. Words are singularly the most potent force available to humanity. We can choose to use words constructively with encouragement words or destructively use words of despair.

According to Stoic ancient Greek philosophies (Robertson, 2024), words shape perceptions. The language we use is not just a means of communication but a powerful tool that directs attention to specific phenomena. Words frame events and impact relationships, which can also lead to the polarisation of views. Therefore, the way we use language can help shape our thoughts and emotions. Words create reality; they have the power to inspire, motivate, and impact the world around us.

Political discourses are social practices, and all social practices are tied to specific historical contexts. Social practices are the mechanisms by which existing social interactions are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. The power to use, interpret, exploit and innovate generic forms is a function of generic knowledge, which is accessible only to the members of a certain group or community. The claim of Critical Discourse Analysis is that major political and social processes and movements have a partly linguistic and discursive character (Fairclough, 1993).

Social and political changes in contemporary society, in general, include a substantive element of cultural and ideological change, such as constructing a new hegemony, a new basis for winning popular consent. For example, '*Mzee wa Vitendawili*' in Kenyan politics, used to refer to Hon. Raila Odinga, the former prime minister, is meant to discredit his capabilities. In addition, such changes include a set of free-market economic strategies such as '*Bottom up*', an ideological political project of the United Democratic Alliance for strengthening and centralising the state, pushing back the strategies and institutions of social democracy.

The bottom-up should be understood in the political sense as being associated with distinctive linguistic representations of social reality and distinctive linguistic constructions of social and political relations and identities (Bolton & Braj, 2006). Bottom-up is a political discourse trying to win widespread acceptance.

Discourse is not produced or understood without considering its context (Wittgenstein, 1967). Utterances are only significant if we consider their use in a specific scenario if we understand the underlying conventions and rules if we recognise the embedding in a certain culture and ideology, and if we know what the discourse relates to in the past (Wodak et al., 1990, 1994). Discourses are always linked to other discourses that were produced earlier, as well as those that are produced synchronically. We also include intertextuality as well as cultural knowledge, for example, 'The Martha Karua vs Rigathi Gachagua' 2022 Debate. In William Ruto's speech, the presidential debate relates to what had happened in his government earlier, to other speeches and proclamations, and to certain laws and actions which were undertaken. We note allusions in his text, presuppositions of certain worlds of knowledge and particular intertextual experiences that are meant to help us understand his term as Deputy President.

Viewing discourse as a form of social action, the aim of CDA is to uncover opaqueness and power relationships. CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm. Critical linguists make explicit interests that otherwise would remain uncovered. For example, the use of sexist language in political rhetoric when the then deputy vice president William Ruto referred to Eugene Wamalwa as a '*woman*'. The reaction to this statement served to influence public opinion of what kind of leader the DP is, he has low regard for women. The relevance of CDA is to help change consciousness and provide guidelines for non-sexist language produced in many countries (Wodak et al., 1987). It also advocates for change in discourses and power patterns in institutions. Thus, the need for the 2/3 gender rule in the Kenyan constitution. Attention is drawn to the choice of the Running Mates in the run-up to the general election of 2022. This paper explored

the power of words in political discourses of the general election campaigns in Kenya, explicating the impacts of these words on the electorate.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Chomsky (2004) argues that anyone's political ideas or their ideas of social organisation must be rooted in some concept of human needs. The fundamental human capacity is the need for creative self-expression and the free control of processes. The creative use of language is a free instrument of thought and expression. Wodak (1989), in her book on power, language and ideology, remarks that people use linguistic strategies to persuade others to act in a certain way. She argues that there is power in political jargon. She analysed texts in pre-fascist Italy, using textual and linguistic methods and actual historical events. She demonstrated the active political potential of texts in lending credence to political argumentation. The critical study of the potential texts helped reveal the ideological and pragmatic functions of propagandistic discourse. She concluded that the power of words contributed to the success of political movements.

In the current paper, the socio-economic differences between the people in the low-income cadre and the rich were effectively enunciated through the power of word choice. Language plays an important role in the study of political processes such as campaigns. Ideology, as a system of ideas based on value judgements, according to Wodak, aids certain forces within society to further their interests or to stabilise their power.

According to Thomas (2012), it is not only which word more accurately reflects one's worldview, but which word is chosen may also affect people's perception of the world. Power is the force in society that gets things done, and by analysing the power of words, we can identify who controls what and for whose benefit. To see power at work is through politics. Power is often demonstrated and achieved through language. Political power is achieved through speeches and debates. To this end, in order to understand how power is exercised through language, there was a need to study the terminologies used by politicians,

such as those that create stereotypes of negative perception like '*mzee wa vitendawili*' or reinforce negative thoughts.

Bernard et al. (2005) observe that political language needs to be connected to action to stabilise and legitimise the functions of political ideology. According to these authors, ideology provides consistency for political actions. The authors argue that democracy can only exist when communicative exchange among citizens taps into fundamental values and beliefs that create shared meanings and help citizens make judgements about political actions.

Politics is concerned with power, the power to make decisions, control resources, control other people's behaviour, and control their values. Values are encoded in words. Campaigns are about winning more votes than the opposition. Campaigns are then structured through a reduction in language and demographic segmentation of the electorate, such as the *Hustler vs Dynasty*. Campaigns are then structured to identify undecided voters by grouping them using short catchphrases like *boda boda* and *mama mboga*. The media are the intermediaries who then spread the Strategists' message to the public. The voters or citizens have no active role as choosers of the direction of government.

The words used by the Kenyan politicians have not been subjected to a linguistic study and documentation. Therefore, a study on the terminologies used by politicians during campaigns should contribute to a deeper understanding of Kenyan politics.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper is hinged on two theories: Michel Foucault's Political discourse and critical approaches and Norman Fairclough's Critical discourse approaches.

Foucault sees Discourse as Knowledge and institutions that give a right to speak about a certain subject. Discourse is an enunciating subject; it is not Top-Bottom. Discourse is material and shapes people's bodies and spirits. For example, in the USA, during the interviews, there is a dress code for Men and Women

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because the interview is a discursive space. Even facial expressions are discursively produced. Discourse is discursive; we do, perform and interpret a certain discourse which has constructed our consciousness. What we do is constructed by a discourse, for example, Valentine; we use the discourse of Romance because we have internalised its logic. We also use certain vocabulary. Discourse, then, is constructed by a scientific body of knowledge that people believe in and that has material impacts.

Michel Foucault views discourse as knowledge and power. Power is diffused through the body politic. It touches and shapes human bodies. Power is productive and creates its own resistance. Knowledge is crucial to discourse. All social practices should be understood by discursive representation. Discourse defines, allows and limits. Discourses are tied up with power, and discursive practices regulate people's conduct. Foucault's power also produces domains of objects and truth. Dominant discourses privilege those in power by legitimising existing power relations and social structures. Therefore, discourse and institutions are bound up with institutional practices. In using Foucauldian DA, the focus was on discourse, explicit forms of power and politics, taking into consideration. Everything, including pictures, visual phenomena, icons such as wheelbarrows and the large-scale rhetoric of politicians.

Power is the ability to exercise hegemonic dominance over individuals. It is also the ability to influence individuals to indicate the recognised supreme authority in a society. Friedrich Nietzsche understood the will to power as an ambition. Michel Foucault argued that power is everywhere; it is not located in an institution or state. Power is a relationship of forces that occurs in a society at a certain time; it refers to the taking over of leadership in Kenya after the elections of 2022 and the current call for demonstrations in Kenya. Although power, law and truth feed off each other, power always maintains a certain preponderance over law and truth (Foucault, 2000). Modern power is encoded in social practices and human behaviour. The subject gradually accepts the subtle regulations and expectations of the social order.

To Norman Fairclough, CDA focuses on how language maintains and changes power relations in today's society, the ways of analysing language that can reveal these processes and how people might become more conscious of them as well as be more able to resist and change them. This is relevant to students of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysts (Fairclough, 1989). Discourse is a place where power is actually exercised and enacted. Power is then realised in face-to-face discourse as well as in cross-cultural discourse, and the hidden power of the mass media discourse sets the agenda.

Fairclough's interest was in how power is exercised through language. He views discourse as interdisciplinary and language as a form of social practice. He developed a three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. The first dimension is text, which can be speech, writing or images. Here, the analysis is at the word level. The second dimension is discursive practice, which involves the production or constitution of text. Here, the analysis is at the text level. The third dimension is social practice, which includes the standards of society and social structures. Here, the analysis is at the level of the norm. In the analytical framework, Fairclough argues that language creates change and can be used to change behaviour. Language then becomes a power tool. Text is a collection of words, characters or images that we choose when we speak. Words show our attitude to the subject. When we choose our words, we express an attitude towards the subject, for example, when Raila Odinga is referred to as '**Mzee wa Vitendawili**' and when the then DP is referred to as '**thief**'. Discourse is about language as a community, and the words we choose make us part of a community, for example, **the Kenya Kwanza** and **Azimio** as political parties. Thus, any text analysis contains interpretations.

For Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we understand that language can be a bearer of change. The way we talk about a subject can change our view of the subject. Language, then, is subject to interpretations. Language is not neutral; it carries values, attitudes and assessments that the sender wishes to convey to t

Language as social practice, according to Fairclough, creates opinions and is associated with power. Part of our communication is a social event, and as such, it creates social relationships. Our words form part of the social community in which we are located, as in a political party and its supporters. Language is, therefore, linked to society as an organisation with certain norms and traditions.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in nature and utilised qualitative and discursive resources. The researcher tried to elucidate structures of ideas serving political power by analysing the means and patterns by which ideology is linguistically realised. She watched, saw, listened, read and identified topics and themes. She used her own linguistic knowledge to identify strategies employed by politicians in their rhetorical actions, such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification and mitigation.

The analysis was based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, which incorporates the analysis of texts; texts can be images, writing, speech or a mixture of all three forms of communication; the analysis of discursive practices including production or the constitution of text, the way we talk about, the sender and receiver, values and attitudes and, drawing on other discourses; and, the analysis of the social practice which includes social relationships and practices and, the social community that is associated with power and certain norms and traditions.

Also, in the analysis, Foucauldian political approaches and critical approaches were used. According to Foucault, discourse is a group of statements that provide a language for discussion and a way of representing knowledge about a certain topic at a specific historical moment. In this case, the run-up to the general elections of 2022 in Kenya. All social practices should be understood by discursive representation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of '**Bottom-up**' as an economic model is an ideological political project for strengthening and centralising the state, pushing back the strategies and institutions of social democracy. Bottom-up is associated with distinctive representations of social reality and distinctive constructions of social and political relations and identities. Bottom-up is a political discourse trying to win widespread acceptance (Bolton & Braj, 2006). As an economic model, it is anchored on a deliberate program that promotes investment. To the supporters, it is a solution to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich. The proponents argued that 'bottom-up' was a blueprint targeting investments by ordinary Kenyans and empowering them financially so that the country could generate taxes to spur the economy. As DP Ruto said, '*I will work hard to implement every aspect of what I say. The bottom-up will work and must work. I can assure you that.*' Ruto's choice of words, such as the 'Bottom-up' economic model, effectively attracted the citizens, shaping their thoughts and emotions and promising to eradicate poverty.

According to Foucault (2000), discursive practice is a process of turning people into subjectivity. Political discourse tries to reorganise people through the science of divisions of people. For example, the *hustlers* and the *dynasties*. Politically, then, people come to believe that they have to act in a certain way; they embrace the rhetoric of the politicians and become political subjects. Thus, political discourse produces knowledge that shapes the reality (Hall, 1997).

## Hustlers

The hustler economic model is a philosophy that formed a cornerstone of the then DP Ruto's 2022 presidential campaigns. It advocated for a trickle-down economy as opposed to the one characterised by cartels that aid patronage and cronyism and benefit a few individuals. This model targeted the *unemployed*, *hustler enterprises*, *farmer groups*, *fishermen*, *boda boda riders*, *mama mboga*, etc. The proponents argued that this was a bottom-up, middle-out economic approach. The hustler ideology was coined by William Ruto, who called himself a 'hustler' who understood

the challenges of poor people. He persuasively convinced the listeners to identify with his hustler identity, thereby influencing their points of view. The hustler phrase was repeatedly used during his campaigns, and this resonated well with the majority of the youths who were themselves poor.

Discourse defines, allows and limits a targeted group of people. Hustlers are positioned as people who are struggling, the underprivileged, the underdogs, and the common citizens. So, then the people locate themselves and adopt such subject positions as 'Hustlers'. This is a form of nomination with the objective of discursively constructing social actors by choice of diction or deixis. The hustler then became a huge economic model. We notice how power is exercised through language; language is viewed as a form of social practice. Language is used to create change; in this way, language then becomes a tool of power.

According to Fairclough (2014), language creates opinions and characterises attitudes; it creates social relationships and practices, forming a social community. Language then forms a context that is connected to certain norms and traditions, resulting in a strong organisational culture, such as the hustler nation. With the formation of the hustler nation, the political discourses then were geared to the ideology of structural change and reforms.

## Kenya Kwanza Pesa Mkononi

Language use and the choice of words can be a bearer of change. Kenya Kwanza is now the ruling coalition party, which has amalgamated several affiliate parties. The catchphrase '*Kenya Kwanza pesa mfukoni*' was used as a power tool to get the Kenyan people to vote for leaders of that party. It promised to address the issues and aspirations of the Kenyan people, give them a good life, and improve their quality of life. Basically, the target was the young people with no jobs and many more unemployed Kenyans. There was also a promise for cash awards in terms of loans to the poor to boost their economic activities (Onyango, 2021). This political rhetoric massively appealed to the electorates, helping with voter mobilisation.

In the Presidential debate of 2022, the running mate of the president argued that the People of Kenya were in anguish and that his party would put money in their pockets. His argumentation strategy was that the people in power allocate resources to projects where they had an interest and could not benefit the general public. Using referential strategies, he argued that people have used offices to usurp public resources for personal gain. In other words, people in power compete with citizens over scarce resources.

## State Capture

The then-running mate of Raila Odinga was asked in the Martha Karua vs Rigathi Gachagua debate to explain the meaning of State capture. We see the media media setting the agenda for the nation to ponder over the meaning. Martha Karua argued that state capture is where people in power use positions to advantage themselves. Every penny intended for the public ends up in individual pockets. For example, money intended for health services, fertiliser subsidies, etc. On the other hand, Rigathi Gachagua explained that state capture is chronic corruption exemplified by the then-first family, who are the richest people in Kenya yet exempted from paying taxes. He discursively qualifies the first family negatively as being corrupt, effectively swaying the public against the party supported by the first family. He implicates the former president by explicitly referring to the standard gauge railway, which cost 3.8 billion yet is not very useful to the people. He qualifies his argument by stating that this is usurping public resources for personal gain.

The more the Kenyan people were exposed to those debates, the more the salient issues gained prominence. The Kenyan media media played a key role in popularising the 'Bottom Up' economic model by making campaign rhetoric the centre of focus. The local media aired news showing William Ruto distributing wheelbarrows and carts to poor Kenyans (Karanja, 2022). These acts of generosity gave the young people a promise of hope and endeared Ruto to the majority of the poor looking for help to mitigate their harsh economic conditions.

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In the Martha Karua vs Rigathi Gachagua debate, we notice the *Framing of the former president*; Rigathi argues that the differences between Uhuru and Ruto are due to an inferiority complex. This serves to make the public change their view of how they have previously viewed the former president. Language is not neutral; it carries values and attitudes. This argument presupposes that Uhuru is inferior. When he says that he does not drink alcohol, it implicates Uhuru as a drunk. This is a self-serving bias of positive self-representation and negative other representation.

## **Azimio**

This is the political party that belongs to the official opposition with its affiliate parties. Its supporters argued that it had been formed to rescue people from the strongholds of the cartels. They argued that the corruption cartels with whom they were competing were cartels with huge bank balances. Martha Karua, the running mate of Raila Odinga, specifically in the debate, argued that her party leaders had values, were honest, worked hard and were respectable. **Azimio** was hopeful that the people would be rescued from the corrupt cartels. In a re-joiner, Rigathi Gachagua, in a discourse representation, gives his perspective on himself. He states that he had worked in both the public and private sector, he had been in legislation for 15 years, he had been in management too and that he doesn't take alcohol. This indirectly presupposes that there are leaders who are alcoholics. This becomes a case of positive self-representation and negative other representation.

## **Baba Care**

This was an economic model advanced by Azimio. It was a social market economy whose objective was for social justice and social and economic rights, where the people with no income were given social support to address the basics of life. They argued that the interest of the public was paramount, and they would endeavour to serve the public with honesty and dedication.

## **Handshake**

The handshake was a symbol of National unity. This handshake was between Raila Odinga and the former Republic of Kenya's president, Uhuru Kenyatta. By

then, there was hostility everywhere; the two had called each other all sorts of names, and there was uncertainty about the future. We are told by political analysts that it took nineteen hours for Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga to settle on a handshake. It was about the making of a Nation. Handshake is about thinking big about the country. It was borne out of serious circumstances that necessitated understanding the issues of compromise. When the country is hurting, and in pain, like what is being experienced in Kenya now, compromise is the handshake, which implies sitting down to look for a solution. However, Kenya Kwanza, now the ruling coalition in Kenya, argued that a handshake is a mere language used to try to get power through the backdoor; it has nothing to do with the literal meaning of a handshake. The Kenya Kwanza brigade advanced a view of the handshake as *politics of blackmail*. They framed the narrative that Raila was, after the handshake, trying to sneak into power through the backdoor. In the run-up to the general elections of 2022, Ruto, the then DP, used the term handshake to mean being stopped from ascending to power, the presidency. Handshake, then, acquires a negative connotation in the Kenyan political arena. Supporters of Kenya Kwanza label the opposition architects as **Economic terrorists and political Bandits**. Kimani Ichungwa, the majority leader in parliament, referred to Raila as a political bandit, referring to demonstrations interfering with other businesses. This is a type of language that can fuel anarchy if taken literally. This is the use of a nomination strategy to paint the former prime minister in negative terms.

## **Ruto Rhetorics on the Campaign Trail**

*Tutaeka bilioni Hamsini kwa hawa watu wa boda boda na mama mboga tuwatoe kwa CRB na Fuliza...*

*Hiyo pesa itakuwa bila interest...*

*Ni wangapi wanasema tuanzie hapa bottom halafu twende up?... mikono juu!*

*Salaalee, kumbe nyinyi ni watu wangwana sana...*

## **English translation**

*(We will put fifty billion shillings in the boda boda industry, and for women vegetable sellers, we shall remove them from the Credit Recovery Bureau and Fuliza.*

*The money will be loaned without interest*

How many of you say we start from the bottom going up? Hands up!  
Surely, you people are gentlemen and women)

These messages are aired live by the professional media. The visuals and images intensify the strong power of words. The speaker intends to gain support for his capture of power as the president. The use of code-switching from Kiswahili to English and vice versa is intended to align himself with the people of Kenya. In his argumentation, nobody questions his points of view, albeit with fallacies. Modern power is embedded in social practice and human behaviour. The subjects gradually accept the subtle regulations and expectations of the social order (Foucault, 2000).

By toying with this idea, Ruto's manifesto only concentrated on the low-income earners while ignoring the other vital proportion of the population that own factors of production. According to the daily *Gazeti of Nairobi*, in June 2022, the Sri Lankan president started his presidency with a bottom-up idea, empowering the hustlers, as he identified them. He wanted to empower the nation from the bottom up. However, this populist strategy saw him ignore vital economic factors that caused the nation to fall into an economic crisis. After clinching the presidency, the DP in 2022 blamed the failure of the government to deliver on the *handshake*. However, the official advisor of the government admitted that the government was unable to pay salaries and that they were toying with the idea of redundancy, yet they vowed that in 100 days, they would create jobs for the jobless. He went ahead to say that, if need be, a *handshake* would be inevitable.

### **Mtu Wetu (one of our own)**

Ethnicity and ethnic profiling. Ethnicity has been the dominant dividing line in Kenyan politics. Ethnicity can be seen as a form of political incitement, pitting one ethnic community against another. This was used earlier in time that saw Kenya plunge into ethnic violence due to 'mtu wetu' syndrome.

### **Wheel Barrow**

This was a Kenya Kwanza symbol for their political party. The hustler wheelbarrow ideology should not

be understood in agricultural terms. According to Kenya kwanza, the wheelbarrow is a symbol of fighting poverty whereby the matatu operators, the boda boda riders, the Jua kali artisans, etc, are expected to rise from bottom to top economic ranks. The argumentation strategy by Ruto was that if in a Nation you find a wheelbarrow forming a Nation's conversation, then there must be a serious problem. He promised to give wheelbarrows to hustlers to enhance their way of living. With the hustler language of pesa mkononi, Ruto effectively gave hope to the young people, promising a double-digit economy and creating a million jobs per year. This then saw Ruto ascend to power as the president of the Republic of Kenya. The wheelbarrow campaign by UDA was a sure sign of the Mjengo (construction) jobs that Ruto is promising the youth in Kenya today with the housing levy.

### **Deep State**

A deep state is a governance type made up of potentially secret and unauthorised networks of power operating independently of the political leadership of a state in pursuit of its own agenda and goals. The deep state carries negative connotations. It is like a state within a state.

Historically, a deep state referred to a well-defined organisation which sought to function independently like a shadow government. However, 'deep state' could also refer to a hidden organisation seeking to manipulate the public state. Sources for the deep state could include rogue elements among organs of the state like the armed forces, police, administrative agencies, etc. The functions could be to ensure permanent government, entrenched career bureaucrats, civil servants acting in accordance with the mandate of their agencies, job security, continuity of state itself, enhanced power and authority and can act in opposition to the agenda of elected officials by obstructing, resisting and subverting policies or directives, for example, Ruto's allegations that the deep state was trying to prevent him from ascending to power.

In Kenya, the 'deep state' has been used to suggest behind-the-scenes involvement of the state in Kenya's

elections. This was the biggest catchphrase of the campaign. The term was used to convey the notion of the powerful, shadowy network not formally elected to government but still contorting the wishes of the people during elections and later in the governance of the country.

Raila Odinga's supporters have always claimed that there was a conspiracy at the government's highest levels to deny the former prime minister the role of president. 'Kenyans must know there is a 'deep state' government (Kalonzo Musyoka), meaning there are individuals with enabling capacity. In 2021, another member of the ruling party used the term 'deep state' as in:

*'If you have two candidates at the ratio of 50-50, and the 'deep state' backs one, you can be sure which one will win. The International community plays a great role in ensuring who becomes the elected' (Francis Kimemia, 2021).*

In Kenya's politics, 'deep state remains a deeply ambiguous term used effectively as a conspiracy theory in campaigns to sway the voters. The deep state is used to advocate for what is positive or for what is normative in terms of the workings and effects of policies and social structures.

## Running Mate

The issue of the running mate became an important issue in the run-up to the general elections of 2022. Ethnicity and gender considerations were used to get the most appropriate candidate. A candidate who would attract most of the voters. Although gender was a factor, ethnicity was the major one. Both the Azimio and Kenya kwanza focused on the Mount Kenya region to garner votes, with each principal trying to endear himself to the people of the mountain.

## Mzee wa Vitandawili (The old man of riddles)

This was coined by the then DP Ruto and Kenya kwanza aspirants to refer to the former prime minister, the right honourable Raila Odinga, as a Nomination strategy. Ordinarily, the word 'Mzee' is used to refer to a person who is wise. It is used to show decorum and respect. 'Vitendawili' refers to

wordplay with underlying meanings that are usually performed to test one's wit. Kitendawili in oral literature is a riddle performed as a pastime activity for children.

Raila Odinga used kitendawili as an interactive and entertaining strategy to enable him to sell his agenda. According to Ruth Finnegan (2012), riddles teach lessons in unique ways; they can teach morality, politics, and social relationships. Raila used riddles to highlight issues of immense political concern affecting the citizens, such as greed. These are cases of political satire that use figurative language to attract the audience. In her study of Vitendawili, Barasa (2018) examined the representation of Raila Odinga in his use of riddles. The findings revealed that he used riddles and metaphors to discuss serious issues and to construct his opponents in a negative light. In another study, Ijem et al. (2018) analysed political discourse in Nigeria. They analysed the implicit intentions of language users and the ideological configurations. The findings revealed the hidden power relations within socio-political and cultural contexts.

But to other politicians, the use of riddles took on a different interpretation. For example, in Ruto's words: 'Raila, Mzee wa vitendawili, anaweza kuongoza Taifa Kweli?

Mtajua hamjui

Watu wachache wako na ushawishi

Wanataka kuwapanga, mtawaambiaje?

'Hatupangwingwi'

Kuna watu wachache ambao ni vibaraka wa

Kitendawili

DAP (democratic alliance party) ni chama cha ukora.

This text is a discursive event, according to Foucault. It is produced within a discourse that constitutes a certain interpretation. This is a political discourse; it is a discourse of campaigns for general elections. The text 'Mzee wa vitendawili' is an idea that means something else. First, it discredits old age as lacking the power and agility to lead the country. This is a case of negative representation of Raila. It is a rhetorically persuasive strategy that appeals to the electorate to beware of Raila. This represents Raila as childish and not a serious leader. The speaker presupposes that

Raila is up to something that the people do not know. He, Raila, is a strategist and uses the people of the DAP Party as his cronies to help him ascend to power. There is no clear truth in this utterance; to arrive at its interpretation, we have to follow the discursive framework within which these words gain importance. We then come to understand the power dynamics of the campaign discourse.

Otieno (2019) examined metaphors in political discourse in Kenya. His findings revealed that politicians use metaphors to structure and limit the thought processes of the electorates so that they can view politics from a certain perspective and that both positive and negative axiological values are present. In another study, Jilala (2016) argues that the use of metaphorical language is an immediate and effective device for behaviour change.

## Dynasty vs Hustler

This was a term coined by DP William Ruto following a political upset. Uhuru Kenyatta had agreed to support Ruto for the 2022 presidential elections but reversed the decision through the handshake with Raila. Ruto labelled Uhuru's Dynasty in contrast with his own hustler identity, as discussed above. He embraced this ideology despite his own substantial wealth. According to Pike (2022), Ruto invites his supporters to put aside ethnicity and embrace a new identity- as the betrayed and long-suffering group. This then led to Hustler Nation, the people who are striving. This earned him sympathy as his rhetoric resonated with the majority of the people of Kenya. Ruto's argumentation strategy is *anti-authority*, sending the message of marginalisation and disempowerment of the low-income group.

According to Karanja (2022), *dynasty* refers to wealthy political families that have enjoyed the benefits of power. We see the power of language and rhetoric in the quest to influence voters where there is a shift

from ethnic to class-based that culminates into a face-off between the rich and the poor.

We note the role of the media in popularising and framing the hustler vs the dynasty. Because of the power of the media in setting the agenda, an online survey by Onyango (2021) revealed that the hustler vs dynasty narrative shifted the voting pattern of the 2022 elections. Politics and media are inseparable in Kenya. Politicians are both shareholders and owners of the media (Somerville, 2011). The Hustler vs Dynasty narrative won favour with the populace who were facing harsh economic conditions. According to Ruto's campaigns of 2022, the Top-down economic approach had failed to alleviate economic hardships. He promised handouts in terms of *Hustler funds* to start businesses, which, according to Otieno (2021), was unrealistic and populist. Hustler vs dynasty could create class conflict. The same was echoed by NCIC (2021), arguing that that kind of language could risk plunging the country into chaos and, thus, advocated for strong action against it. That notwithstanding, 'hustler vs dynasty' became the logic that framed Ruto's election.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussions, we can conclude that discourse is an enunciating subject. It has players and actors who engage in a discursive event and together form a certain discourse. Discourse is material, and as such, it impacts human bodies and behaviour. Discourse, being a discursive practice, is subject to interpretation. Language is a key element in discourse, and thus, it becomes a powerful tool. Politicians, in their campaign rhetoric, employ strategies such as argumentation, nomination, predication, attributions, and self-serving biases to endear themselves to the electorate. They also employ ideologies to lure the voters. All these, then, form the language of politics, which has the power to initiate change in human behaviour and in government structure.

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