



OeAD Alumni Talks

LANGUAGE AND POWER

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Outline of Presentation

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- My Stay in Vienna
- Tips for Vienna

PART II: Language and Power

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- Kenyan Linguistic Landscape
- Hate Speech and Ethnic Violence in Kenya



PART I – Personal Details

- I am a Kenyan aged 51 years old
- Married for 28 years
- I have two children: young adults of ages 25 and 23
- I am also foster mother to three children who are now young adults of ages; 30, 26 and 24.
- I am an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Laikipia University in Kenya
- I perform both administrative duties as dean of one of the schools as well as teach Linguistics in the department of Literary and Communication Studies.



Personal details cont...,

- Mentorship programmes for both undergraduate and graduate students.
- Supervision of Masters and PhD students.
- I am a committee member at the Directorate of Research, Extension and Consultancy
- Chairperson of the Publications Committee
- Editor-in-Chief of the Laikipia University Journal for Social Sciences, Education and Humanities
- Advisory board member for the Laikipia University Journal for Science and Applied Technology



Felicia details cont...,

- Guest editor for various publications with several international bodies
- Peer review for both national and international journals
- Collaboration between Laikipia University and the Administration Police Service, which is under the National Police Service in Kenya
- Human Rights programme at the University
- **Current research;** On girls and high school achievement, and GMO and food security in Kenya



My Stay in Vienna

- From October 1999 to November 2002, I studied at the University of Vienna, Institute of Applied Linguistics
- Scholarship: OeAD under the North-South Scholarship programme
- Supervisors: Prof Ruth Wodak and Prof Florian Menz
- The title of my thesis: **Language and Discrimination: A Study of Gender and Discourse in Workplaces in Kenya**
- Currently (5th January to 1st April, 2015), I am an Ernst Mach Follow-Up Grant Scholar.



Tips for Vienna

- Find out where your embassy is and register your presence there
- Look after your health; Listen to your body
- Attend as many socio-academic functions as possible organised by the OeAD
- Take advantage of facilities the OeAD has to offer.
- Always have your travel ticket with you when travelling in public transport in Vienna
- Draw up a Time management plan for all your activities



PART II: LANGUAGE AND POWER

Introduction

- Authentic examples show the way language works in cultural contexts to shape ideologies and create unequal balances of social power
- Close linguistic analysis reveal the complex relationships between language, power, manipulation, coercion and even resistance.
- How is power represented in spoken and written discourses?
- How do participants in interactions position themselves and others?



Introduction cont...,

To answer some of these questions, we look at two distinct uses of language

- ***Language as public discourse***: the language used in the public print media, television, radio and the web
- ***Language as interpersonal communication***: the language used when as individuals interact with other individuals, e.g. friends talking, doctor and patient, teachers and students, mother and child, etc



Language as public discourse

- The focus is on the power of dominant institutions within our society and how these institutions maintain their dominance through the uses of language (i.e. Media; Newspapers, TV, Radio, Advertising, etc).
- The public institutions have various powers, i.e., they control the flow of information: what get into the press, and how it is presented.
- The public media is the primary means of shaping public opinion. And if one can shape public opinion, then one can change (or strengthen) the power structures that exist.



Language as public discourse cont...,

- Two ways to exercise power;
 - through physical coercion; and
 - through manufacture of consent or winning the consent of the majority (hegemony), which involves convincing people that they should accept things as they are, or accept proposed changes.
- Since physical coercion is time consuming and works only on small numbers at a time, **the manufacture of consent is the much preferred vehicle for exercising power.**



Language as public discourse cont...,

- The public media are the prime vehicle for manufacturing consent as the media allow contact with large numbers of people, who willingly read/listen to the media.
- What are the strategies used in public media to shape your opinion and thus to change or maintain social reality?
- We thus explore the way that language is manipulated to shape public opinion.



Selecting relevant Information

- Which facts get reported?
- Which facts are fore-grounded? Which ones are back-grounded?
- How are participants presented? What words describe them?
- Hiding Agency; who commits an action, especially if the action is negatively perceived, so that the writer hides responsibility.



Language as Interpersonal communication / Power in Private Discourse

- This is the power of individuals to influence interaction with others.
- Most of this power stems from a mastery of **linguistic skills**: Knowing *when* to speak (and when not to speak) and *how* to speak. (personal language competence)
- Another source of power stems from the **social roles** that the individuals fill. Examples, doctor / patient; teacher/pupil; judge/accused, etc.



Language as Interpersonal communication cont...,

- Power also stems from the **social relationships** we have formed with those with whom we talk.
- Do they trust us or not? (Credibility).
- Do they like us?
- Do they respect us? The amount they listen to us and allow us to influence them depends on these factors.
- If what one says is always worth listening to, then wherever one speaks, those that know you will listen.



Kenyan Linguistic Landscape

- 2014 world bank report, population recorded at 44m
- Language groups are Bantu, Nilotes, Cushites, Arabs, Indians and Europeans
- Kenya has about 42 ethnic languages and many dialects.
- The languages with the largest number of speakers are Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin, Kamba, Kisii, Meru (in that order), and others....
- Official languages: English & Swahili (also national)
- Many Kenyans are bilingual if not trilingual
- General elections in Kenya; voting patterns are usually along ethnic lines



Hate Speech and Ethnic Violence during General Elections in Kenya

Introduction

- What exactly is the role of hate speech and propaganda in relation to extreme violence?
- Do words direct violence?
- Do they move formally non-violent people to commit acts of violence?
- How powerful is language?



Hate speech cont...,

- Speech is tied to context. The **context** in which speech occurs helps determine its impact, as does the **position** of the person(s) speaking.
- Additionally, hate speech alone does not indicate impending violence.
- It is only by analysing **contextual cues** that the potential threat of any given speech can be evaluated.
- It is not always easy to identify hate speech, especially **subtle forms** of hate speech.



Hate speech cont...,

An attempt to define hate speech in the Kenyan context

National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC)

Act defined hate speech as follows:

‘any person who utters words intended to incite feelings of contempt, hatred, hostility, violence or discrimination against any person, group or community on the basis of ethnicity or race commits an offence.....’

Question; where is gender? Where is religion? What about the aged?



Two Key Characteristics of Hate Speech

1 Dehumanisation

- This refers to groups or individuals with animal names, and it can even be more subtle:
- One subtle form involves denying a group the characteristics of human uniqueness such as civility, moral sensibility, rationality and maturity



Hate speech cont...,

2 Simplistic and Unbalanced Communication

- Hate speech violates standards of argumentative integrity. **For example:**
- Arguments put forward by target groups are often *misrepresented* and they are often *blamed* for politicising events or societal problems for which they are not responsible.
- Perpetrators of hate speech often present subjective arguments as objective truths and have often refused rational discussions of Others point of view.



Hate Speech cont...,

- In December 2007, Kenyans were subjected to steadily increasing hateful language delivered in a wide variety of media, including *public speeches* by political leaders, *flyers, posters, radio* (from broadcasters and audience members calling in), *SMS text messages, email and posts on the internet* (facebook, blogs....
- Much of this language was directed at other ethnic or tribal groups within Kenya
- Leaders often spoke to their communities in coded metaphorical language



Hate speech cont...,

- A historical background of hate speech with every general election (1991, 1997, 2007) in Kenya largely fuelled by politicians' negative verbal campaigns.
- They used ethnic stereotypes to reinforce and rally support while simultaneously spreading suspicions against other ethnic communities.
- These hate speech lead to ethnic clashes and violence, and in each cycle, scores are killed and thousands displaced.
- We have the concept of the IDP.



Hate speech cont...,

- It was found that hate speech was predominantly based on **ethnicity** and **religious affiliation**
- Online hate speech disseminators largely identify themselves with a real or fake name
- They used languages widely understood in Kenya (English, Swahili and *Sheng*), then Luo and Kikuyu.
- Over 90% of all inflammatory speech was on Facebook, making it the highest source of such content.



A sample of metaphors perpetuating hate speech

- The monkeys are the same like the ones in the 1970s only the forest is different.
- You cannot elect hyenas who are filled with greed and looking for opportunities. **In African folklore, hyenas are most disdain of animals.**
- The mongoose has come and stolen our chicken
- This is a leadership of baboons
- **Uhuru ni mungiki na *Raila ni shetani*
- *Raila is compared to Idi Amin and Hitler
- *They were presidential candidates



A sample of metaphors cont...,

- **Luos* are lazy. They do not work. They are hooligans. When they rent houses, they do not pay. People wont pay rent if ODM wins elections.
- **Kikuyus* can not be trusted. They are greedy and selfish
- All Maasai must leave; they are from Tanzania, and without identification cards (Kayole)
- Let us remove the *Sangari* (weeds) from our crops
- Let us remove the *madoadoa* (spots) amongst us
- * Two large communities who produced the presidential candidates, Raila and Uhuru.



Vernacular Radio Stations

- Vernacular radio stations, just as community can be very important and useful in the growth and development of the community, i.e., providing health awareness and information, education and entertainment.
- But they can also be a double-edged sword used for **negative developmental purposes**
- Encouraged violence by propagating messages of intolerance and misinformation that have the tendency to manipulate the public to resort to violence.



Vernacular Radio Stations cont...,

- Vernacular radios served as the platform for the mobilisation and coordination of violent activities by the various ethnic groups in the 2008 post election violence
- One Kenyan news anchor is now at the International Criminal Court (ICC) to answer charges on the same
- We remember the Rwanda 1994 genocide: a local radio station actually broadcast inflammatory statements full of hate and propaganda and caused more ethnic violence in that country



Vernacular Radio Stations cont...,

- The vernacular radio stations were accused of spinning information to support candidates and parties who are **of the same tribe as their audience, while castigating those who are not of the same tribe.**
- The radio played a big role in the action of the audience because they **mobilised and encouraged them not to accept defeat whenever it arose.**
- They used coded language full of rhetorics and metaphors
- They used propaganda to manipulate



Vernacular Radio Stations cont...,

- They conducted live talk shows
- They had call in shows
- They played hate songs
- Because of the rate of believability for radio amongst locals, it became very easy for people to take up what was said on radio and believe it as a form of gospel truth



Interventions to Control Hate Speech in the Run up to 2013 General Elections in Kenya

- These efforts/interventions sought to diminish inflammatory/hate speech while protecting freedom of expression.
- It was hoped that these interventions would prevent violence in Kenya in the 2013 General Elections by diminishing the impact of inflammatory / hate speech.
- These efforts focus on the audience, with a view to ‘inoculating them’ against the effects of inflammatory speech.



Monitoring speech through UMATI

- This group monitored online inflammatory /hate speech and classified it according to its dangerousness (its capacity to catalyse violence. Why?
- Hate speech distributed via mobile and digital technologies played an important role in catalysing the 2007-2008 violence. Yet only scant documentation of such speech was available.
- UMATI sought to correct this, if as feared, inflammatory / hate speech would feature in the 2013 elections as well.



NIPE UKWELI (Give me the truth)

- Text messages were sent by Civil Society organisation (CSO) to counter rumours and inflammatory/hate speech in areas prone to ethnic violence.
- This was to persuade Kenyans to resist and refute false rumours which have special potency among groups of people who are already fearful and afraid.
- They made an emphasis on the fact that lies are often used by inflammatory speakers to manipulate them



Peace TXT

- Peace TXT sent out pro-peace text messages to counter the sort of inflammatory /hate messages used to catalyse and organise Kenyan violence in 2007-2008.
- This was a project implemented by *Sisi ni Amani* (We are peace).
- It sought to reduce violence by distributing short messages encouraging peace and patience in response to specific circumstances or events that could be precursors to violence in Kenya



TV Programme (*Vioja Mahakamani*) Drama in the Courtroom

- Is the oldest comedy show on TV in Kenya since 1974
- In total, 4 episodes of 40 minutes each were shown to the Kenyan public with an intention of educating them about inflammatory /hate speech, with a view to helping them resist it.
- All episodes produced in August 2012 and filmed in October and November 2012 and re-runs done in the months leading to elections in 2013.
- An independent evaluation of the intervention suggests that the programmes made citizens in areas prone to violence be more sceptical of political leaders who use inflammatory language.



Advocates for the Removal of Hate Speech from the Internet

- Founder of the forum Mashada, one of the oldest websites in Kenya was shut down by its founder David Kobia because he could not continue the torrent of hateful and violent speech pouring onto the site.
- Many other sites were also brought down



Self-regulatory Media Systems

- Media; was seen as stimulating and exacerbating the violence with ethnically charged hate speech in 2007-2008.
- Media oscillation **from engaging in hate speech to adopting a peace narrative** in 2013 is seen as a swing from sensationalism to silence.
- However, many experts in Kenya viewed self regulation or self censorship at the time of the country's 2013 general election as negative, as they felt that the media was not fulfilling its role as a watch dog.



Other Important Milestones

- The 2010 Kenyan Constitution
- Major Reforms; for example, Devolution
- Judicial Reforms
- Directorate of Public Prosecution
- Set up of Commissions: (NCIC) National Cohesion and Integration Commission, KNCHR (Kenya National Commission for Human Rights, TJRC (Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission).

***Unfortunately, hate speech anchored on ethnicity still continues on social media.**



**I thank you for listening to me
and I invite your questions
and remarks**