



A Deconstruction of Strategic Linguistic Elements Used to Invoke Gender and Power During Debate in Busia County Assembly, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study set out to establish manner in which linguistic elements are used to invoke gender and subsequently bargain for power during County Assembly debates. The objective of this study is to analyze the effects of linguistic elements employed to bargain for the dynamics of power and invoke gender during debate. The study employed the Critical Discourse Analysis theory (CDA). Current literature has been reviewed for the purpose of identifying areas that have been studied and the gaps existing with the intent of filling them up. The study involved collecting linguistic data from the assembly as recorded in the *Hansard* and audio recordings of assembly

proceedings. The data has been analyzed according to the objective, been described and relationships - between speakers, choice of discourse and discourse function have been explained. The study targeted a population of 53 Members of the County Assembly from Busia. Linguistic techniques that refer to gender have been discussed and their effect on listeners and subsequent speakers analyzed. Conclusions have been drawn and recommendations made. On the whole, there is a harmonious and healthy linguistic relationship in the county assembly. However, more elected women would bolster their agenda and increase their participation towards the move to achieving gender parity in terms of representation.

Keywords: *Gender, Power, Debate, Linguistic elements.*

Introduction

Background to the Study

Kilimo (2010) notes that Kenya is a patriarchal society where politics is considered a male domain with women being regulated largely to domestic chores. Further, that women interested in politics face many obstacles such as lack of political party nomination, abuse, violence, propaganda, negative publicity and discrimination. Many others have failed to get

family support and have had to choose between family and politics- with many withdrawing from politics altogether.

Bloomert (2011) states that in recognition of the pivotal function played by women in matters of development, the United Nations incorporated women empowerment among the Millennium Development Goals in the year 2000. Several conferences worldwide have been used to provide political visibility to the rights of



women. However, no equal advancement in numbers has been realized for women occupying political offices. Men continue to dominate political spaces and offices, public leadership roles and elective offices; all this is despite initiatives to legislate quotas and encourage women's political leadership.

Dunmire (2018) notes that analyzing political discourses involves a multi and inter disciplinary research which pay particular attention to both the discursive and linguistic aspects found in political talk and text and on the political character of discursive practice. The current study, which focuses on gender, power and linguistics, is inter-disciplinary since it acknowledges that the analysis of discourse cannot singularly function within a discursive and linguistic framework; it has to make use of the frameworks, methods and contents of other disciplines in order to study socio-political matters and phenomena important to scholarship.

The IPU report (2009) notes that women are known to have been discriminated against both economically and politically; they are reported to have faced many barriers- their gender being the top-most. Due to this, they have endured many stereo-types, have even had to contest against structural barriers like political parties and electoral systems. Alhasan (2007) notes that the language of law and politics has treated women as inferior to men and has systematically 'kept women in their place' by defining, labeling and stereotyping them as: infantile, incompetent, immoral, seductive, mother, wife, as non-entities and non-persons.

For this study, the researchers have endeavored to establish how female MCAs linguistically seek to set their agenda; pursue, maintain and wrestle for power on the assembly floor in a house where they are the minority and one that has traditionally been considered a male domain. This is especially so since the floor of the assembly is a place where power is contested by use of language.

Statement of the Problem

The current study set out to explore the language used by MCAs in the assembly during debate in the chamber- especially how language is used to advance or oppose gender; the manner in which language is used to contest, negotiate or retain power. How women MCAs have sought to get their voices heard and the manner in which male dominance is perpetuated using language on the assembly floor have been of key concern in this research. Therefore, this study has been an investigation aimed at deconstructing linguistic strategies that are employed to invoke gender and power during debate in the county assembly chamber.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study have been to:

Analyze the effects of linguistic elements employed to bargain for the dynamics of power and invoke gender during debate.

Research Question

What are the effects of the linguistic elements employed to negotiate the dynamics of power and invoke gender during debate in the assembly?

Justification

This study is unlike previous ones since it has set out to show how linguistic choices affect debate and how these choices come into play in the contest for power in light of gender. The study has paid special attention to the relationship between male and female representatives during debate on the county assembly floor. This ties with the objective of this study which is to find the linguistic elements used to bring out gender and power but also state their effects on the participants during the debating process.

Scope of the Study

The current study has been conducted in Busia County. Its study population has been the Members of the Busia County Assembly. The study's main focus has been on debate within the county assembly chambers. It has emphasized on the linguistic output of the assembly's members on the floor of the county assembly for a period of only three months out of the five year

lifespan of the current assembly that runs from 2017-2022.

Limitations of the Study

The current study has been limited to the use of recorded Busia County Assembly proceedings' transcripts in the form of *Hansard* reports and audio recordings for a 3 months period of the second county assembly of Busia County. Another limitation has been the identification and use a sample of both male and female MCAs for interview purposes. Its results cannot therefore be used as a generalization of all county assembly debates in Kenya.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The section that follows immediately shows studies related to power and other related aspects and how they relate to the current study.

Studies on Power

Foucault (1982) notes that the practice of power should not be regarded with simplicity and be seen to be a relationship between partners, individual or collective: rather, it must be seen as a practice through which a number of acts have an influence on subsequent ones and that power and authority only exist when they are practiced. Each relationship of power implies a strategy of struggle or resistance. Strategy in this case refers to means enlisted to achieve a certain end, in a manner that an individual or group targets to gain an upper hand over others. To Bourdieu (1991) linguistic exchanges are symbolic relationships involving power where such power relations between individual speakers or their respective groups are actualized. It can therefore be assumed that power relations in assembly debates are characterized by instances of conflict and cooperation, and that power is negotiated and challenged through linguistic interaction.

Wodak (2009) explains that *habitus* is seen in all daily interactions. It's therefore important to acquire the rules governing the game; any society or organization will require that its members are socialized into these rules. Wodak's study pays attention to 'identity' and 'multiple identities'

that politicians are known to acquire and the manner in which they undertake their parliamentary duties. Further, she observes that it takes time for socialization to fully take place in order for one to effectively function in the institutionalized life of politics, this includes mentorship undertaken by political colleagues or party advisors in order to empower occupiers of political offices and spaces acquire a common approach and code of thereby familiarizing with the rules expected in the house. The current study has explored the links that exist between language and the gender of the politician. The institutionalized and more or less similar way of linguistic behavior of the assembly affects language use by MCAs during debate as they are aware of the stipulated norms they have to abide by.

Wodak (2009:35) avers that it is how one uses language that gives it its power. She further argues that language by itself does not hold any power; this situation only changes when people who are known to be powerful make use of it. This assertion is important to the current study since it focuses on language use during interaction in the assembly.

Gal (1991) asserts that for power to be realized, it ought to be opposed through strategic appropriation of ideology saturated in discursive forms. Inoue (2007) whose focus is on neoliberalism and linguistic governmentality argues that speakers have to take personal responsibility for how they use language.

Thornborrow (2002) states that power arises when a set of linguistic resources available to a speaker are made use of more or less successfully based upon the person speaking and speaking context. She views power as being accomplished in discourse by turn taking and the space given to speakers or which they access during interaction, with regard to the things they can accomplish effectively using the available space. Further, Holmes (2005) emphasizes that in responding to the behavior of others, individuals are in the process constructing their own identities and roles in the display of power by use of discourse.

Wodak, (2009) argues that while in groups, men have a regular tendency of occupying the floor for longer periods, that they have a tendency of interrupting more and making several kinds of contributions, by employing strategies to dispute, create and hold on to status distinctions. Women have been reported occupy the floor infrequently, and for short periods, they do not have a tendency to interrupt, and are known to employ speaking styles that are helpful to other members and that minimize status distinctions.

Debate in the assembly occurs in spaces dedicated to talk in an institutionalized context that has particular characteristics. Wodak (2001) observes that assembly language is like any other persuasive discourse but is non-the- less different with regards to its core functions: decision making and legislation. Assembly discourse exemplifies the normal techniques of verbal engagement that includes allocation of turns and appropriation to official sessions. This further includes interruptions of a speaker on the floor, institutionalized forms used to open and close debate, including irrelevant side queries that have a tendency of cropping up or official statements or apologies in official settings.

Bayley (2004) states that both linguistic and non-linguistic behavior such as irony, tolerance of aggressive linguistic behavior, humor and general politeness in a given culture have a tendency to appear in the language used in parliament. Bayley (2004) also proposes that the discourse practiced in parliament is according to rules of engagement which all parliamentarians are expected to conform to. Further, discourses in parliament are at times adversarial.

Van Dijk (1997) observes that modulating the voice- volume by either, speaking in low tones or shouting; intonation and pitch that a speaker chooses to use can have an effect on other participants during discourse with regard to attention and comprehension of what is said. How one chooses to speak subsequently has an indirect function through which preferred meanings and interpretations are emphasized through high pitch, raising intonation and sometimes by shouting.

The rules and regulations that govern the nature of debate in the county assembly are set out in its *Standing Orders*. It is incumbent upon members to speak to one other using the third person as “Honorable [surname]”; they must avoid a direct form of address to another as *you*. In spite of the existence of such rules, a few members still do not adhere to them and sometimes participants fail to address each other through the chair. When the rules of engagement in assembly debate are violated, it is not accidental; most times it is a strategy employed to get at another participant. The current study has considered this dimension in the analysis of linguistic strategies employed in the assembly.

Debate transcripts in the county assembly are edited in a similar manner to parliamentary debate elsewhere. Chilton (2004), notes that the *Hansard*, which is the written report of parliamentary proceedings makes corrections on certain aspects spoken in order to obtain an idealized representation of the debating session. This is also the case in the Busia County Assembly since it has a *Hansard*. The corrections or ‘repairs’ are made in order that errors, repetition, hesitations and false starts are not included. Additionally, unparliamentary language that also includes direct address not made through the chair are edited. MCAs are also given an opportunity to liaise with stenographers to make corrections on things that had been said.

Slembrouk (1992) studied *Hansard* reports and compared them with the spoken word and characterized the discrepancies as assumptions within the institutional framework on issues that are considered to be of relative significance in the description and delineation of the discourse used in parliamentary. These deviations between the spoken and the written text should be taken into account during analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a specialized approach that is used to study and analyze emerging critical semiotics, critical linguistics, talk and text; it is a socio-politically deliberate and differentiated manner to be used to analyze and investigate practices used in

communication and discourse (Van Dijk, 1995). It does not characterize a school, field or sub-discipline in the analysis of discourse neither is it issue oriented; rather it is problem or issue oriented. Van Leeuwen (2006) states that it is an explicit and critical approach, stance or position that is to be deployed in studying of talk and text. Additionally, that CDA is premised on the notion that talk and text have a pivotal function in upholding and propagating injustices; and ultimately legitimizing oppression and inequality in society.

CDA is perceived as essential in a number of ways: it has an attitude that is unapologetic, and explicit concerning acceptable values (Van Leeuwen, 2006); it is committed to the analysis of socially unacceptable vices such as inequality in terms of accessing power or prejudices (Fairclough, 2009); it is interested in discovering the prevailing hegemonic social practices that have brought about these vices and in the development of approaches applicable in their analysis (Bloor and Bloor, 2007).

Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (1997) additionally state that a crucial analysis goes beyond hermeneutics. To them, CDA is targeted towards demystifying discourses ideologically shaped by relations of power; it pays focus to the obscure relationship between discourse and the structures in society by ways of candid interpretations and explanations. CDA relies on methodical systematic steps, that is, by effecting distance from the data and applying them to the context.

CDA is typically inter or multidisciplinary, and pays particular focus on the relations between society and discourse and these include politic, culture and social cognition. CDA might also consider all dimensions and of discourse- those of style, speech acts, style pragmatic organization and grammar including interactive ones among several others. Toolan (2002) states that CDA has been used to explore discourses of racism and anti-Semitism, immigration and asylum, the discourses of neoliberalism and their role in neo-capitalist policies and practices of governments, gender, education, doctor-patient communication, war and terrorism, welfare and

unemployment. CDA has also been used to pay attention to and study debates in parliament, reports in the media, editorials and the speeches politicians make. CDA is an intervention meant at grounding critical discourse in social theory and articulate the relationship that exists between discourses and the social practices in which they are embedded.

As such Van Dijk opines that the analysis of discourse should concentrate on the following linguistic makers: intonation and stress, ordering of words, lexical style, coherence, disclaimers as semantic moves, choice of topic, speech acts, schematic organization, use of rhetorical figures, choice of syntactic structures, turn taking, repairs and hesitations.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study has employed the qualitative research design. This involves describing naturally occurring phenomena. Issues being studied can be understood better only if they are seen in context. A qualitative research involves the researcher immersing her/ himself in the setting.

Study Population

The study population is Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) in Kenya. The Busia County Assembly has a total of 53 members; 33 are male and 20 are female.

Study Location

The study has been conducted in the Busia County Assembly in Busia County. The researcher has selected this particular county since it is the researcher's county of residence and is therefore accessible and familiar.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher has used the non-probability sampling strategies. Here, convenience sampling technique has been used to identify the Busia County Assembly. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, (1997:79) refer to purposive sampling as 'sampling those most convenient.' The Luhya, who form the majority in Busia County commonly refer to themselves as 'Mulembe

Nation'- largely because they are known to be socially harmonious-this again makes the choice of Busia County purposive since this refers to handpicking supposedly typical or interesting cases (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1997:79).

Units of linguistic analysis

Every county assembly debate is a long document as a text. It is usually a day's sitting. The Busia County Assembly usually has weekly sessions in the following way: Every Tuesday 2.30pm to 4.30pm; Wednesdays: 09.00 am to 10.30am then 2.30pm to 4.30pm; Thursdays 2.30pm to 4.30pm. Each session in this sense has been regarded as an Interactional Unit, henceforth IU. The researcher has purposefully identify those periods when the county assembly is busiest especially during the budgeting sessions and when there are important bills to be discussed as the source of data that is adequate to study the phenomena in question; this, Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1997) refer to as "Time sampling."

Data Collection instruments

The researcher has collected data though a video recordings of county assembly proceedings from the Busia County Assembly Library and Communications Office. These have been used to analyze the unedited spoken words, and the manner in which they are produced by the MCAs. The video recordings have further help the researcher to be objective.

Data Analysis Procedure and Techniques

The analysis of data in this study was based on the following techniques: first the data was played several times. Those sections that refer to gender and power were transcribed. Additionally, those that involved MCAs responses to gender and power were transcribed and studied.

Research Findings, Analysis and Presentation

Membership of the Busia County Assembly

In the study it was observed that a majority of members of the Busia County Assembly are

male. Only two women were elected with 16 being nominated to raise their number as is required by the Constitution of Kenya (2010)

References to gender

Using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory as espoused by Van Dijk and other scholars who discuss it, the following were observed.

Text 1

Speaker: ...We start with the senior gentlemen Hon. AB and Hon. AQ.

The effect of the term above is that it gives preference to a section of the House. It therefore makes the MCAs referred to as such feel as being a cut above all others. One would need to think critically and prepare well before taking them on. It is a continuation of the perceived male dominance of the House.

Text 2

Deputy Speaker (M): You know the sultan is here but I don't want to declare myself as sultan....

The effect of this is that it creates an air of superiority for the person referring to himself as such. It is a way of the continuing entrenched hegemonic practices. No member of the house responds to the above reference, it only creates humor among them.

References to Power

From the data, it has been observed that some speakers have used a single strategy to challenge for power while in some cases speakers have used more than one strategy to drive their point(s) across.

Patronizing

Text 3

Hon. AF (M): I want to differ with AE...what the Speaker is trying to say AE is the way you are framing it...Mr. Speaker, we are not insane, we are stating facts...

Speaker (M): I agree with you. I accept you are a good speaker...

The speakers are male. The speaker is impolite and does not appropriately refer to the previous speaker. According to the House Standing Orders, a member should always address another through the Chair with decorum as “Honorable.” However, the speaker on the floor inappropriately refers to the former by name; and this should not be a direct address to the former but rather an address to the chair. As such this can be regarded as patronizing. In fact, Hon. AF goes on to say that they are not “insane” to imply that everything is going on as planned; it is a strategy. He simply refers to him as “AE”, more than once. This could be seen as a patronizing strategy since he, AF, assumes a higher rank and AE a commoner’s. This is being impolite and therefore damages and has a tendency to reduce the status of Hon. AE.

Accusation as a Strategy

Text 4

Hon. AB (M): Passing this document as it is equivalent to a felony. This document ought to be rejected.

Members do not directly refer to this term, however, the members take the cue and launch a spirited linguistic attack against the authors of the said document. Further accusations are not aimed at individual MCAs but at the committee as a whole.

Refusal to Cede the Floor

It was noted that during debate, most members confined themselves to the time allocated for debate. However, there were others who refused to cede the floor when there were points of order or when prompted by the Speaker of the house. Of significance are instances when female members refused to cede the floor to an otherwise charged house as in the instance below:

Text 5

Hon. AA (F): ...I know! I know! (Overlapping communication between her, the Speaker and other members).

(Turn too close, almost overlapping)

Hon. AA (F): Yes! (Raised voice)

The issues raised by the honorable member irk several members present and there are a number of attempts to call points of order; on some occasions the Speaker attempted to stop the member but she raised her voice and so she went on until she had completed her presentation that was altogether charged. Members of the house continued with debate either supporting the Supplementary budget statement or pointing out issues they were uncomfortable with.

Hesitations

Text 6

Hon. AU (F): I am honorable BKP representing Bwiri Ward. (Speaking hesitantly and clearly breathing heavily and audibly as to be heard over the public address system...then speaks with a clear voice and the breathing is regular and so cannot be heard)

Her hesitations and loud audible breathing are a sign of the difficulty she faces as a member of a minority party Ford –K. Other members, including female Members of the County Assembly do not “come to her aid”. In fact, the other female Members of the Busia County Assembly, both elected and nominated who belong to the majority party, heap praise on the Budget Committee for considering their proposals. This is an indication that despite the perceived solidarity between the female Members of the Busia County assembly, they have been divided along certain interests.

Speaking Style

During the 97th sitting until the 100th sitting of the 5th session, honorable AV, a female nominated member of the county assembly, occupied the position of Speaker as warranted by the constitution and Standing Orders governing the management of the business of the county assembly. During these sessions, the whole house sat as a committee in order to debate and adopt bills that had been passed at various committee stages. It was noted that she used standard forms with regards to grammar and pronunciation. She was formal, articulate, confident, audible and self-assured. She explained herself clearly to members and gave guidance appropriately. Rabiah (2012) states that

(good) language is a sign of authority. That a leader who has mastered language and who can express himself or herself with clarity and in a straight forward manner shows the authority and as such the power that the particular person has. Below is part of her linguistic interaction with members:

Text 7

Acting Speaker Hon. AV (F): Yes honorable AW.

Hon. AW (M): Madam Speaker, this is a house of order and procedure. We are on item 5. Madam Speaker the Chairs who have been on the floor have been on item 6- Notice of motion. They are not on item 5.

Acting Speaker Hon. AV (F): Honorable AW, they have been laying the paper. We are in Order number 5.

Hon. AW (M): They are in Order number 6 Madam Speaker.

Acting Speaker Hon. AV (F): They have used the words "To lay the paper." Can you kindly re-phrase using the words "laying the paper" and see how it comes out. Those are the procedural statements that a Chair can say.

Hon. AW (M): Then it is okay.

Acting Speaker Hon. AV (F): Just come up...try using an example of agriculture and we'll see the difference between yours and the others.

The effect of her speaking style is intimidating and Honorable AW, a male member of the assembly who had been occupying the floor. Honorable AW feels intimidated, stutters and quickly finds a way of disengaging.

Self Introduction

It was noted that whenever a member of the county assembly stood to speak even after the Speaker of the house had introduced them, most members went on to restate their names and the wards they represent and whatever positions they hold in the county assembly as Chairs of committees or such other positions. Ideally a self-introduction should include name and occupation (or desired occupation) and key facts that will help a person make an impression on

the person or people one is addressing. According to Marshall (2022), it is a way of making people "care who you are." If others do not care about your name, it is a way of making yourself memorable (ibid). Below are illustrations:

Text 8

Hon. AE (M): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I am honorable AE, Chair Justice and Legal Affairs Committee.

The effect of stating one's position in the House gives the said members authority to address their issues with a feeling of confidence and responsibility.

Friendliness

Positive politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by highlighting friendliness. They include juxtaposing criticism with friendliness, establishing common ground and using jokes, nicknames and other in-group identity markers. In the data analysed, the texts below exemplify this strategic use of language in the debating chamber.

Text 9

In an exchange with the Speaker of the House, the following was said:

Hon. AH (F): Now that I am on the floor, can I continue?

Speaker (M): No! No! Let me get something. You are a member of the committee...it ought to be 100% not 107%.

Hon. AH (F): It's not 100% because of the faulty information we have here.

Speaker (M): But now after the amendment, will it be 100%?

Hon. AH (F): Yes sir! (With a rising intonation)

Honorable AH, a female member of the house demonstrates extreme politeness towards the Speaker. This is not according to the house Standing Orders which clearly indicate a formal way of responding or appreciating the Speaker/ chair of session as: Yes Mr. Speaker sir. In the later, the Speaker is appreciated for the role while

in the former, Honorable Toloi fails to acknowledge the role of the Speaker in guiding the house. It presupposes that she is subordinate.

Cooperation

The effect of this linguistic strategy is to give reward, and subsequently mark herself and committee for future benefits.

Use of Disclaimers

Miller (2022) states that a speaker can choose to use this linguistic element in a strategic manner in order to increase the audience's attention. When a speaker does this, the audience is likely to appreciate their honesty, tune to the whole presentation with the end result of earning credibility while undermining the other person that is the focus of what is being said. This is contained in the texts below.

Text 10

Hon. AE (M): I am an honorable member who is embarrassed. Up to today midday I did not know we have a special session to deliberate on the document before this house and approve it. I stand here on behalf of 30,000 people who elected me....

The first effect of the strategic use of emotion is to express dissatisfaction. The disclaimer has the effect of removing himself from the mistakes of others and as such presents himself as innocent. The effect of the strategy employed by Honorable AE is that it ascribes power to the electorate- the 30,000 he represents and further cautions members against being used to pass bills without their input. In turn, the Majority Leader, the leader of business in the house accedes that the document be retracted and members be given time to have their input. This must be seen as a contest between the executive and the house.

Use of Unparliamentary Language

This includes several linguistic techniques such as being direct, hedging, minimizing imposition, being apologetic, impersonalizing speaker and conformity to a general rule.

The texts below are an illustration of the manner in which this was observed in the data analyzed.

Text 11

Hon. AE (M): Mr. Speaker, I was just trying to pump some sense...

The effect of the expression “pump some sense” implies that a member is not sensible; the user of the phrase assumes a patronizing strategy by portraying the other as lesser. This must be seen as an insult. This is unparliamentary. Members of the county assembly respond to the technique employed by the current speaker by protesting. Many other speakers rise to air their voices, some for or against. In the very end the Finance report is rejected – perhaps because of the posturing adopted linguistically by Honorable AE.

Hedging

Mira (2010) observes that hedges are linguistic devices and strategies that are used to express uncertainty or hesitation as well as to demonstrate politeness and indirectness. According to Lakoff (1972), hedges are generally used to obscure or make fuzzy one's intentions. Fuzzy language refers to strategic manipulation of hedges so as to deliberately introduce ambiguity. Hedges can also be used to express sarcasm and as such undermine power.

Text 12

Hon. AH(F): Mr Speaker, I thank the committee for the budget because projects in my ward have been incorporated. But I am hoping they will not be left out because sometimes operations in this county are sometimes wanting...Mr. Speaker if someone asks you for 300,000 and you give them 15 million because it has a signature from the governor- money that the department is not ready to account for especially on how previously allocated funds were used...there's a letter from the governor, well signed. But Mr. Speaker we are doubting its origin. It should be investigated further. Mr. Speaker, there is an annex here from an engineer. Engineers give BQs. We want this house to give us BQs, not informal documents. I am worried this document is not valid because it is not signed anywhere. I don't know this engineer. I don't know how it got to this document....

The effect of this is to show the extent of the irregularities in the said department and

committee and as such move other galvanize other members of the house into action: to reject the report. This must be seen as a challenge to power. The speaker also strategically repeats herself using parallel structures when she says: “I don’t know this engineer, I don’t know how these documents got here.” The effect of this is to further challenge and undermine the said committee. It is an indication that power is vested in the assembly; not with the subcommittees especially because one of the principles of assembly member’s rights to free and unhindered speech.

Directness

Greinger and Mills (2016) state that directness has on many occasions been considered as an ungracious harshness and therefore impolite. It is also largely used in commands. In speech, it can, and has quite often been used as a direct communication to the intended recipient or recipients; as such, the message may only be relevant to a small percentage of those receiving it. The illustrations below are used to demonstrate this as found in the data analyzed.

Text 13

Speaker: honorable Leader of Majority, you are making so much noise I can’t even concentrate.

This has the effect of damaging the face of the majority leader; he is stopping the house from transacting business effectively. Order is restored and the house business resumes promptly with the house speaker giving guidance appropriately.

Damaging face

These are speech acts that are directed to a listener in order to make him or her be embarrassed and ashamed. According to Korashinadze (2015) and Derrick (2010), one way of doing this is by “belt-lining.” Like fighters in a ring, each of us has a “belt line”- this refers to a person’s emotion. When one is hit below this beltline, injury and serious damage may occur. Another such face attacking strategy is blame. Instead of focusing on finding solutions, people tend to focus on others. This has a tendency to divert attention from the problem and create resentment; as such, the conflict is

likely to spiral into a personal attack as shown in the data below from the Busia County Assembly.

Text 14

Mr. Speaker I have always given you a lot of respect. When the minority leader in this assembly stood to explain himself then you became worried, you had even given your opinion on how Honorable OB had proposed that they be given two weeks. Mr. Speaker, we have never been used by anyone. We were sent here by the electorate so that we can represent them fully. When Honorable LY was pointing out anomalies in the document, two, three, we were not foolish. The honorable members of the Busia County Assembly sat down and in one accord agreed that because of the flaws cited, if we approve these people, it would be shameful to the electorate since we will not have followed the law. That is why Mr. Speaker, we said that your proposal for two weeks that Honorable OB presented here, according to the law, will give the governor a free hand to proceed. And that is why we are asking you to allow us to dispense with this matter at this point so that the nominees can be rejected at this early point. We do not see a problem in you repeating the exercise a second time. Why are they giving us a seven day notice? What for? I request you, Mr. Speaker, give us time now so that we can fulfill our mandate as given by the electorate. (Applause) We have been great friends in the Busia County government but the things down there (are terrible) You cannot sit over such a matter for six months that concerns the ordinary citizen then when it reaches then you rush us to approve that these people be employed. The ordinary citizens are suffering, Mr. Speaker, from where you sit, do you think it is in order? When honorable members raise this matter you feel that we do not like you. Mr. Speaker I am your friend but if there is a law, let us uphold it. You are a lawyer, Mr. Speaker. Some of us have not had the opportunity to study law. Kindly guide us according to the law governing the Busia County Assembly. Just accept, now so that we can dispense with the matter at hand. We want to finish this matter. Thank you for listening to me.

The use of these words is strategic: the speaker is portrayed as having had vested interests or was being pushed from outside the house to make

the bill on the nominees to pass unscrutinized with the effect of removing power from the members of the county assembly. The current member on the floor goes on to make a declaration that they have never been “sent by anyone” and that they owe their allegiance to the people. Power is ascribed to the voters and as such to the members of the county assembly, not to forces outside the assembly. It is also instructive that the member on the floor is an elected member, not nominated. He sees himself as such. The member goes on to declare that they were not fools or foolish. The member goes on to openly question the speaker and by doing this undermines the speaker’s authority as an impartial leader of the house business.

The semantic moves described above have several effects. The member undermines the position and standing of the speaker. The member further ascribes power to the members of the county assembly by virtue of their representative role. The member also damages the face of the speaker and as such asks him to distance himself and allow for debate. This is what ultimately happens. There is more debate by members. Strong opposition to the position initially adopted by the house speaker is voiced. More cheers and applause from the rest of the members are expressed. Seen in the exchanges below. Ultimately the bill fails to sail through.

Subtlety

It is the property of being skillful or clever with language. It is a speech act that is sometimes difficult to understand, is elusive and sometimes difficult to detect and describe the speakers’ intentions (Harris, 1991). The texts below illustrate this.

Text 15

It was noticed that a Member of the county Assembly referred to himself severally as follows:

Hon. AO (M): I am honorable AO representing the great people of Malaba Ward.

The effect of this statement and reference makes its user feel powerful. He assumes he is representing people and voters greater than those in other electoral areas in the county. To

others, it is probably just a harmless statement made by a “mischievous” MCA in the house.

Summary of the Results

The research question for this study has been:

- i. What are the effects of the linguistic elements employed to negotiate the dynamics of power and invoke gender during debate in the assembly?

The linguistic elements strategically employed during debate in the Busia County Assembly have had several effects both on the members involved in debate and in the agenda and debating process in the house. The researcher observed that the strategic use of linguistic elements at times changed the course of debate by forcing the Speaker of the house to intervene or the members on the floor to cut short or even change tact. Some linguistic strategies adopted were aimed to bring down a *bill* or motion that had been tabled, some were strategically used and such bills and motions were referred back to committee for debate and incorporation of issues raised. Sometimes language was observed to have been strategically used to pass a bill or motion. These strategies at times boosted the morale of the member on the floor and drove the agenda forward or intimidated the member who had to quickly withdraw to go and re-strategize at committee or in a subsequent session. This latter fact also affected the Speaker of the Busia County Assembly on more than one occasion when the members were seen to challenge authority, defy orders and sought to have their ways. In doing this, powerful forces outside the county assembly that had sought to use members as rubberstamps had to withdraw to let the members have their say and way. The strategic use of language to invoke gender was also seen to have effects on the debaters and the bills and motions and discussion. The house had to for instance reject certain bills or order that they be reconsidered in subsequent sittings only after the gendered matters raised had been incorporated.

Conclusions

It is appreciated that in the Busia County Assembly, members have the right to express themselves in a healthy manner that is ultimately expected to bring positive changes to the management of affairs not only in the conduct of business in the assembly but also with regards to service delivery. It has been noticed that members are keen and are eager to play their oversight roles and this must be applauded.

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