



# MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



## The Role of Context in Interpretation of Political Utterances on Hate Speech in Kenya

Wangatiah, I. R. Makata, Ongarora, D., Matu, P.

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.46886/MAJESS/v5-i1/2431>

DOI: 10.46886/MAJESS/v5-i1/2431

*Received: 07 June 2017, Revised: 29 July 2017, Accepted: 04 September 2017*

Published Online: 17 October 2017

**In-Text Citation:** (Wangatiah et al., 2017)

**To Cite this Article:** Wangatiah, I. R. M., Ongarora, D., & Matu, P. (2017). The Role of Context in Interpretation of Political Utterances on Hate Speech in Kenya. *Multilingual Academic Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 69–84.

**Copyright:** © The Authors 2017

Published by Knowledge Words Publications ([www.kwpublications.com](http://www.kwpublications.com))

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Vol. 5, No. 1, 2017, Pg. 69 - 84

<https://kwpublications.com/journals/journaldetail/MAJESS>

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<https://kwpublications.com/pages/detail/publication-ethics>



# MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



## The Role of Context in Interpretation of Political Utterances on Hate Speech in Kenya

Wangatiah, I. R. Makata

Department of Language and Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya  
Email: wabgatih@yahoo.com

Dr. Ongarora, D.

Department of Language and Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya.

Prof. Matu, P.

Department of Language and Literature Education, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya.

### Abstract

This paper analyses the role of context in interpretation of political utterances on hate speech in Kenya. The political landscape in Kenya has been characterized by multiparty politics since early 1980's. When the Kenya African National Union (KANU) party won the 1992 general election amidst stiff rivalry from other political parties, some of the political parties that lost the election to KANU decided to merge into political coalitions so as to remove KANU from power. The end result of this political scenario has been a heightened political rivalry between coalitions of political parties. This rivalry is characterized by fierce exchange of political discourse with hardline ideologies resulting into a polarized Kenyan nation. This kind of political environment in Kenya has culminated into events such as the infamous Post-Election Violence of 2007/2008. One of the factors that have been widely speculated to account for the animosity amongst Kenyans is hate speech perpetuated in political utterances. This paper analyses selected political utterances on hate speech to demonstrate that politicians in Kenya heavily rely on context to encode hate speech messages in their political utterances while making the utterance meaning obscure. The paper attempts to show how context is therefore central to pragmatic interpretation of political utterances on hate speech. In fulfilling these objectives, the paper applies principles advanced in Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1985, 1996 & 2004) in the pragmatic interpretation of political utterances on hate speech. Content analysis procedures were used in the selection of relevant data from pre-election campaign speeches rendered during the 2013

General Elections in Kenya. The pre-election campaign speeches for the 2013 General Elections in Kenya were retrieved from the archives of the leading media houses in Kenya; Kenya Television Network (KTN), The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and The Royal Media Services (CITIZEN). The paper argues that political utterances on hate speech in Kenya rely on the context surrounding the utterance to generate the possible intended hate speech message. It further argues that politicians in Kenya are able to deny certain interpretations of meaning given to their utterances on hate speech because the contexts surrounding such utterances obscure utterance meaning by generating multiple pragmatic interpretations.

**Keywords:** Political Utterances, Hate Speech, Context.

### **Language and politics in Kenya**

Politics in Kenya and the world over has evolved into a social activity that has taken centre stage in the daily activities of human life and it defines how a politician interacts with the rank and file. As a result, politicians have come to be associated, and so it is assumed, with specialised and skilful use of language to win support from members of the society and even influence the thinking and actions of their supporters. In highlighting how critical politics has become in human existence, Habwe (1999) notes that politics has had an overwhelming importance in people's lives and it relates with people directly and immediately while displaying a complex language matrix on which politicians depend for persuading, commanding, threatening, bargaining, reassuring, imposing and reasoning. In reinforcing the relationship between politics and society, Eagleton (2000) and Bayram (2010) observes that the way we perceive language is the foundation of our social construction and individual or group relationships. Sociolinguists have tried to account for individual or group relationships to establish how language operates in society as a medium of building relationships and perceptions. It is within this framework of understanding on how language operates in society that this paper investigates the role of context in interpretation of political utterances on hate speech in Kenya.

Expression of political content in society is made possible using language in both verbal and non-verbal communication. In fact language is the prime vehicle for politics to the extent that politics cannot exist without language. The language of politics is described as political discourse and utterances in political speeches form part of political discourse. From a rather general perspective, Dijk (1997) observes that political discourse is defined by both text and context. Politicians generate political talk only when their talk is contextualized in such communicative events as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies and protest demonstrations.

Apart from the crucial contextual dimension in the description of political discourse and its many sub-genres, there is the element of structures and strategies of political text and talk itself. In analyzing political discourse, Dijk (1997) says there is need to understand that there may be some properties that distinguish political discourse from discourses in other societal domains (like education, business, religion) which enables researchers to differentiate the sub-genres of political text and talk from the other discourses. Further, one needs to be aware of the distinctions within political discourse, for instance a parliamentary speech of a politician and how it differs from a campaign speech of the same politician. This is because discourse structures may have many functions, in many different contexts and in many different genres. van Dijk (1997) concludes that once particular properties of political contexts have been analyzed, political

discourse analysis in many respects will be like any other kind of discourse analysis. The specifics of political discourse analysis therefore should be searched for in the relations between discourse structures and political context structures. Thus, whereas metaphors in classroom discourse may have an educational function, metaphors in politics will function in a political context. In other words, the structures of political discourse are seldom exclusive, but typical and effective discourse in political contexts may well have preferred structures and strategies that are functional in the adequate accomplishment of political actions in political contexts. Therefore, the analysis of political utterances on hate speech in this paper has been carried out cognizance of the existence of several other types of discourses as explained by Dijk (1997) and much effort was made to confine the analysis to political utterances in pre-election campaign speeches that were rendered during 2013 General Elections in Kenya.

From a different perspective, Wodak (2007) explains that that words and phrases in political discourse can receive different interpretations depending on the ideological framework in which they have been used. She explains that ideologies can be equated with intended and non-intended meanings; with illocutionary and perlocutionary forces depending on the context surrounding the discourse. This suggests a context-dependent view of political ideology; that different contexts and different audiences yield ideological dilemmas, basic contradictions and different readings (interpretations) when analysing certain political speeches or genres. These observations on context-dependent view of political discourse are part the subject of investigation in this paper; to investigate how politicians in Kenya manipulate political talk to effectively utilize context to encode hate speech messages. Hate speech messages result into negative ideologies that lead to hate and discrimination against certain individuals or group of people.

According to Bayram (2010), every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. The linguistic texts developed to realize political goals are then described as political discourses. Political discourse is therefore a result of politics and it is historically and culturally determined. It fulfils different functions due to different political activities and it has a thematic dimension because its topics are primarily related to politics such as political activities, political ideas and political relations. Language, both in politics and elsewhere, has a key role in the exchange of values in social life and transforming power into right and obedience into duty. It may both create power and become an area where power can be applied. Social values and beliefs are the product of the institutions and organizations around us, and are created and shared through language. The views contained in a linguistic text (or discourse) correspond to the views of the social status of language users, thus providing simple labels which evoke social stereotypes that go far beyond language itself. For instance, listening to a given variety, acts as a trigger or stimulus that evokes attitudes or prejudices or stereotypes about the community to which the speaker is thought to belong. These observations by Bayram (2010) are part of investigation in this paper. If language defines social status of the language user, this paper argues that politicians skilfully use language to manipulate context to subvert social status to achieve relevance of utterance on hate speech to the hearer.

Bayram (2010) further observes that the manner in which individuals choose and use different language systems varies according to who the speakers are, how they perceive themselves and what identity they want to project. Language use varies according to whether the situation is public or private, formal or informal, who is being addressed and who might be

able to overhear. The preceding description fits political discourse; given that politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour and often to control their values. Bayram (2010) goes ahead to explain that the main purpose of politicians in using language is to persuade their audience of the validity of their political claims. Political influence flows from employment of resources that shape the beliefs and behaviour of others. Common resources include expert skills, the restriction of information, the ability to confer favours on others or to injure them without physical force, and subtle or crude bribery. Experienced politicians make use of tools such as presuppositions and implicatures in political discourse. Such tools lead the listener to make assumptions about the existence of information that is not made explicit in what is said, but that might be deduced from what was said. This paper interprets politicians in Kenya as a social group which displays a context-dependent discourse described as political utterances.

### **The Notion of Utterance**

The notion of utterance is rather elusive. Eugene (2004) observes that the notion of utterance does not have a precise linguistic definition but says that phonetically an utterance is a unit of speech bounded by silence. Eugene (2004) goes further to elaborate that an utterance is a natural unit of speech bounded by breaths or pauses. In dialogue, each turn by a speaker may be considered an utterance.

However, Bakhtin's (1986) theory of utterance highlights the following properties of utterance which have enabled this study to crystalize utterance as a linguistic unit of analysis and description:

#### **i) The property of Boundaries**

The theory notes that every utterance is a response to a previous utterance. Bakhtin (1986) explains that actual utterances must take into account the already linguistically shaped context into which they exist. Characteristically, any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication and the very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects.

#### **ii) Responsivity or Dialogicality**

Bakhtin (1986) says utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Blass (1990) support Bakhtin (1986) by observing that an utterance exists within a linguistic context of other utterances. Therefore, every utterance must be regarded as primarily a response to preceding utterances and that each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account.

#### **iii) Finalization**

Bakhtin (1986) explains that whenever there is change of speaking subject to mark the end of a speaker's utterance, this end is realized because the speaker has said everything he/she wishes to say at a particular moment or under particular circumstances. When listening to a speaker, listeners clearly sense the end of the utterance, as if they hear the speaker's concluding signal. This is finalization which is specific and is determined by specific criteria (Bakhtin, 1986).

iv) Generic form

According to Bakhtin's (1986) theory of utterance, this property of utterance holds that the choice of speech genre is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants among other related factors. The guidelines stipulated under this property have enabled this paper to classify its object of investigation as political utterances.

Understood from the perspective of Bakhtin's (1986) theory, utterances can be identified as units within which messages are encoded. Therefore political speeches at political rallies contain utterances that contain political messages from politicians. What this paper therefore sought to establish is the role of context in the interpretation of political utterances on hate speech in Kenya. Once an utterance is rendered and recorded, what actually is analyzed on paper is a syntactic expression of the utterance and as such there is need to establish the interface between utterance and sentence.

Potts (2005) attempts to draw a distinction between utterances, sentences and propositions. An utterance is a physical event, located in space and time. The occurrence of an utterance involves two participants; an agent who produces a linguistic object and that linguistic object itself. Potts (2005) describes a sentence as some abstract entity produced by the grammar of a language while a proposition is basically some sort of idea that can be specified with language. Potts (2005) goes further and adds that a single sentence as a grammatical entity can be used in multiple utterances because utterances are rendered within specific occasions each occurring within a unique set of space and time (what Sperber & Wilson (1986) and Blass (1990) describe as physical context of an utterance). For instance, the sentence [I want you to come here] can be used in multiple utterances depending on where the speaker is and on who and where the addressee is. Similarly, as put by Potts (2005), a single utterance can contain multiple sentences. The utterance "I like him: he's nice" contains the sentences [I like him] and [he's nice].

In drawing a relationship between utterance and proposition, Potts (2005) further explains that a given proposition can be expressed in multiple utterances. For instance, the proposition *Peter fooled all of you!* can be expressed by the utterances "Peter fooled all of you!" or "I fooled all of you" (spoken by Peter). Similarly, a single utterance can correspond to more than one proposition. For instance the utterance "It's cold in here" corresponds to both propositions *It's cold in here* and *Someone should close the window*. From this discussion, it is clear that utterances are verbal entities which are perceived as sentence-like structures. Thus after an utterance has been rendered by a speaker what exists thereafter is its representation in form of a sentence-like structure which can elicit multiple meanings. This reveals the fluid nature of utterance; that an utterance is such a fluid verbal linguistic unit with multiple pragmatic interpretations that a speaker can easily deny some interpretations. The denial of one utterance meaning while accepting a different interpretation has characterized political discourse in Kenya and this is what has motivated this study; to establish how context affects utterance meaning in political utterances on hate speech.

### **The Notion of Hate Speech**

The concept of hate speech started receiving profound attention in Kenya after the 2007/2008 Post-Election Violence (PEV) in Kenya. One of the widely speculated causes for the PEV in Kenya

was perpetuation of hate speech by members of the political class. Reports on monitoring of the 2007 elections also revealed that the pre-election campaigns for the 2007 National Elections were riddled with political propaganda and hate speech (NCIC, 2010). The manner in which politicians handled campaigns contributed to the climate of heightened ethnic hatred that resulted into the infamous 2007/2008 Post-Election Violence in Kenya. It is within this mind-set that this paper analyses political utterances on hate speech to establish the role of context in encoding hate messages.

The notion of hate speech has remained fluid and this probably explains why politicians accused of hate speech in Kenya find it easy to deny some of the interpretations of meaning of their utterances. Perlmutter (1999) describes hate speech as speech which consists of verbal and non-verbal expressions that demean, oppress or promote violence against someone on the basis of their membership in a social or ethnic group. Odongo (2010) observes that unlike in the instances of most internationally recognized offences, there is no universally agreed definition of what the term hate speech means. However, she says hate speech refers to words of incitement and hatred against individuals based on certain group characteristics they share. It includes speech that advocates or encourages violent acts against a specific group and creates a climate of hate or prejudice which may in turn foster the commission of hate crimes.

In Kenya, it is in the public domain that political utterances, and therefore political discourses, are used to incite and provoke people into acts which propagate either hatred or love in the community. This has resulted into attempts by Kenyans to classify the language of politicians into hate-speech and, by insinuation, love-speech. To curb the perceived negative effects of hate-speech on the Kenyan people, the Kenya government has enacted legislations to provide a legal framework on how to deal with peddlers of hate speech. In his preface to a paper by The Kenya National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) (2010) on 'Guidelines for monitoring hate speech in Kenya', Dr. Mzalendo Kibunjia observes that:

"...Following the national widespread violence of 2008, Kenya realized the danger she faces in becoming a failed democracy through ethnic hatred and it is in this backdrop that the National Cohesion and Integration Act addresses negative ethnicity and criminalizes hate speech..." (p.3)

The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) (2010) observes that hate speech is a term which refers to a whole spectrum of negative discourse, stretching from hate or prejudice and incitement to hatred. Hate speech is designed to degrade, intimidate, or incite violence or prejudicial action against a person or group of people based on their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language ability, or appearance (such as height, weight, and hair color). Although hate speech, as described above, is termed as "speech", NCIC notes that hate speech covers not only oral or written communication but also any other form of expression such as movies, arts, gestures (symbolic speech). In hate speech, words are not merely "only words", but "words that wound" which lead to harm and violence.

From the definitions of hate speech given above, one may develop a false impression that the notion of hate speech is clear to every mind. It should be understood that an utterance on hate speech can easily receive different pragmatic interpretations of meaning. It is because of this inherent nature of utterances on hate speech that politicians in Kenya find it easy to escape the whip of the law by denying certain interpretations of meaning of their utterances on hate speech. This paper was motivated by this linguistic scenario in the Kenyan political scene to establish how context interacts with meaning in interpretation of political utterances on hate

speech.

The identification of political utterances whose messages constitute hate speech in this paper was guided by the guidelines set out by NCIC (2010):

(a) The speech needs to be examined as one whole; merely picking out a section of the speech that is ambiguous and when heard on its own could raise questions about the intention of the speaker does not help in defining hate speech. The entire speech must be taken into account.

(b) Attention may be paid to the actual language (use), tone of the language or expression; this may be supported by examining whether the language intended to inflame or incite hatred or violence. Seeking answers to questions such as:

- i. Was the speaker using allegory in the speech or was it direct?
- ii. Was the tone one intended to fan emotions or was it calm?
- iii. What signs (paralinguistic features) were used in the cause of making the speech, were they violent?

(c) The accuracy of the statement; a speech on a historical or current fact or on a likely interpretation of a clause (for instance, a clause in the constitution) is unlikely to amount to hate speech. However, when the speech contains stereotypes or lies then it is likely to stir up emotions of hate; for example stating that traditionally, members of a certain community were known to be long distance traders may be a historical fact. But stating that members of that community are known to move about aimlessly would be stereotyping which would not be a fact and such an utterance could excite hate against the community.

(d) The totality of the context; the surrounding circumstances in which a statement was made could help define it. For example, if during a debate on whether leaders tend to fan ethnic hatred in their address a statement is made as an example, even though the statement itself may amount to hate, the speaker may not be perpetrating hate speech.

Having applied the factors stated above in analyzing a hate speech linguistic item, the paper applied the following indicators of a linguistic item with hate speech message as stipulated by NCIC (2010):

- i. Speeches that cause hatred must be such that it will solicit disdain against a person or group because of their ethnicity
- ii. Speeches or utterances that encourage ethnic, religious or group violence must encourage the audience into some negative action.
- iii. Utterances that depict others as inherently inferior must infer superiority and inferiority to parallel groups.
- iv. Utterances that degrade others must infer or state that another person is a lesser human.
- v. Utterances that dehumanizes must state or infer that the other person is not human, for instance, calling them a weed.
- vi. Use of cultural stereotypes; the generalization or categorization of a group while depicting them in a negative way.
- vii. Utterances that promote discrimination on the basis of tribe, color, ethnic group, religious group.
- viii. Use of abusive, negative and insulting language.
- ix. Use of inciting and/or provocative language.



- x. Use of stories that profile people and communities negatively.
- xi. Use of imagery, poems, metaphor and proverbs which could stir up ethnic hatred.
- xii. Pictures published in media which could lead to ethnic, religious, or racial discrimination.
- xiii. Stories or essays used by the media houses to depict others less inferior or which could be used to propagate hatred.
- xiv. Ridiculing of another on basis of ethnicity, race or religious belief.
- xv. Use of alarming language.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson may be seen as an attempt to improve on one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions (Grice 1989). In developing this claim, Grice laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication which has formed the basis for Relevance Theory.

Relevance Theory has been developed in several stages. The initial version of Relevance Theory is spelt out in Sperber & Wilson (1986) and later expounded in Sperber & Wilson (1995) and in Wilson & Sperber (2004). Relevance Theory is a cognitive-pragmatic communication model for interpreting and understanding utterances. It is an inferential approach to pragmatics that is based on the concept of relevance in life. In inferential pragmatics, the analyst seeks to explain how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning on the basis of the evidence provided. The hearer searches for the speaker's meaning by looking for relevance in the speaker's utterance using the available contextual information as evidence.

The theory proposes that understanding and comprehension are directed and channelled by the innate principle of relevance. Sperber & Wilson (1986;1995) and Wilson & Sperber (2004) argue that humans tend to pay attention to what is relevant to them and that humans form the most relevant possible representations of phenomena and process them in a context that maximises their relevance. The principle of relevance works like a filter in the mind of the communicators so that only the information that is selected by that principle leads to understanding of the meaning of the utterance. It is on the basis of this general principle of relevance that this paper holds the assumption that political utterances on hate speech are relevant to the hearer within the context of the utterance. As such the paper goes ahead to investigate the role of context in the interpretation of these utterances.

Relevance Theory operates on three tenets:

- a) The notion of context
- b) The principle of relevance for communication
- c) The comprehension procedure of Relevance Theory

This paper discusses the first two tenets which are most relevant in the analysis of political utterances on hate speech with regard to the scope of this paper:

- a) The notion of context

The search for relevance in an utterance is a psychological process guided by the mental context of the communicators. Sperber & Wilson (1995:15) define context as:

"Context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world."

Schroder (2008) simplifies this as referring to some kind of encyclopaedia about the world which contains the values and norms of a society, personal belief system and cultural norms. Context constitutes all the knowledge that the communicators will have stored in their mind at the time they enter a conversation. Context plays a key role in the interpretation of utterances. There are two kinds of contexts relevant for the interpretation of speech event: the linguistic context and the situational or physical context. Blass (1990) describes a linguistic context as including linguistic information that precedes the speech event while the situational context includes virtually everything non-linguistic in the environment of the speaker. The notion of context as captured in Relevance Theory provides important guidelines for understanding the context of an utterance. This paper sought to find out how context operates in the interpretation of political utterances on hate speech in Kenya.

#### b) The Principle of Relevance for Communication

According to Relevance Theory, utterances raise expectations of relevance because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which communicators may exploit. Intuitively, an input such as a sight, a sound, an utterance or a memory is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information (contextual assumptions) he has available to yield conclusions that matter to him: say, by answering a question he had in mind, improving his knowledge on a certain topic, settling a doubt, confirming a suspicion, or correcting a mistaken impression. An utterance that is relevant to the hearer is one that produces contextual implications such as settling a doubt in the mind of hearer.

Wilson & Sperber (2004:612) provide the following principle of relevance as being the basis for Relevance Theory as a theory of inferential communication:

“Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.”

This means that by saying something in the normal course of human interaction, one is telling the hearer not only that he/she thinks that what is being said is worth the time and effort the hearer will take to process it, but also that no more easily processed utterance would give the same result (utterance meaning). The discussion in this paper is based on the assumption that political utterances under investigation in this paper fulfil the principle of relevance for communication to take place; that the propositions in the political utterances on hate speech are relevant to the hearer within the context in which they were rendered. With this assumption in mind, this paper interprets political utterances on hate speech to establish how the utterance interacts with its context to encode hate speech messages.

The principle of relevance for communication operates on the basis of cost and benefit in the mind of the communicators and it is guided by two aspects:

The first aspect of the principle of relevance for communication is the cognitive principle. The cognitive principle of relevance enables the hearer to single out one possible interpretation as interpretation of communicated utterances, thoughts, gestures and perceptions when information is channelled through it. Wilson & Sperber (2004:610) states that the cognitive principle of relevance is:

“Human cognition tends to be geared to maximization of relevance.”

In a situation where an utterance generates multiple pragmatic interpretations, the cognitive principle of relevance is applied to identify the possible speaker intended meaning.

This principle has two components: an informative component and an intentional component. The informative component is also referred to as 'inferential communication' in relevance-theoretical terms. It communicates the content of the message arrived at through processes such as implicatures, explicatures, disambiguation and enrichment. This component is important in the analysis of political utterances on hate speech in this study because it accounts for how speaker meaning is inferred to arrive at the hate message in the utterance.

The intentional component of cognitive principle of relevance communicates the intention of the speaker. It consists of verbal and non-verbal cues that a speaker builds around his/her message so that the hearer understands the message as intended by the speaker. Due to the informative component's ability to generate multiple pragmatic interpretations from an utterance, further interpretation of that utterance applying the accompanying intentional component enables the hearer to arrive at the possible intended speaker meaning. This is because intentional component contains ostensive stimuli from the speaker that guides the hearer towards the intended message. It is within the framework of these components of cognitive principle of Relevance Theory, informative and intentional, that this paper finds rationale to analyse political utterances on hate speech to establish how context is utilized to encode hate messages in political utterances.

The second aspect of the principle of relevance for communication is the communicative principle. The communicative principle of relevance states that: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance." (Wilson & Sperber, 2004:612)

This principle means that when communicators talk to each other, the relevant theoretical processes of understanding is initiated. Every successful communication relies on the shared background assumptions between the interlocutors. This paper analyses political utterances on hate speech as linguistic units of communication that have multiple pragmatic interpretations. Thus, in order to arrive at the hate message in the utterance as the intended speaker meaning, the process of utterance analysis must factor in notions on the communicative principle of relevance. This leads to identification of aspects of ostensive stimuli used by politicians to enhance communication with the hearers. The ostensive stimuli used by politicians include linguistic aspects of speech rendition that politicians use to establish a shared context so as to drive the hearer to the intended speaker meaning.

### **Role of Context in Interpretation of Political Utterances on hate Speech: A Relevance Theory Perspective**

The notion of context and the principle of relevance for communication are tenets upon which Relevance Theory operates. The two tenets of Relevance Theory work mutually and simultaneously in the mind of the interlocutor with each relying upon the other to yield utterance meaning. The search for utterance meaning in the mind of the hearer starts with a mental search for relevant context of the utterance. As conceptualised in Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; 1995 and Wilson & Sperber, 2004), the search for relevance of an utterance by a hearer is a psychological process guided by the contextual assumptions available in the mind of the communicators. It is therefore a prime responsibility of the speaker to provide a proper context for the interpretation of the utterance to the hearer; if not provided, the hearer ends up deciding on the most possible context of the utterance.

In order to enhance communication of political messages, Speakers of political utterances in pre-election campaign speeches for the 2013 General Elections in Kenya utilized context to encode hate speech messages in their utterances. Past events in the history of Kenya formed an important context for hate speech messages. Consider the utterances below:

“...*Nyinyi mlipiga kura kwa fujo kwangu.* (You voted for me in large numbers.) (Cheers, ululations, vuvuzela and intense whistling from the crowd) *lakini kura ilipofika Nairobi, ikafanyiwa ukarabati mpaka mkasema; no Raila...* (But when the votes reached Nairobi, they were modified until you said: no Raila...)”

Response: No peace

“...*Jamaa wakatoa bunduki.* (Fellows produced guns) (A lot of laughter) *Wakaanza kupiga watu wetu; damu ilimwagika. Nilikuja hapa Kakamega, nikakuta watu wetu wamelazwa; risasi kwa matumbo; risasi nyingine kwa tumbo; nyingine hapa kwa paja; nyingine hapa kwa mguu. Si ni unyama huo?* (They started beating our people; blood was shed. I came here in Kakamega, I found our people hospitalised; bullets in the stomach, bullets in the thigh, another here in the leg. Isn't that brutality?)”

Response: *ndio* (yes) (emphatically)

These utterances were uttered by a member of the CORD Coalition in 2013 to highlight events that occurred during the 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence in Kenya. At the time of the utterance, the events are historical being used by the speaker to create a context that makes the hate speech message in the utterances relevant to the hearer. The informative component of the utterances is to advance an ideological mind-set in the hearer of ‘Us against Them’. ‘Them’ in these utterances are referred to by the pronoun ‘*wa*’ (they) being described as brutal; supposedly implying government agencies. In the context of the utterance, the utterance implies the rival political coalition JUBILEE whose members were seen to be government sponsored. The utterances qualify as hate speech because they are intended to incite the hearer (Us) against the implied ‘Them’ (JUBILEE Coalition). The speaker then uses a dialogue structure in which he allows the hearer to complete utterance that he was saying as a way of confirming if the hearer and the speaker were now sharing the context the speaker had created for the hate message:

Speaker 1: *...si ni unyama huo?* (is that not brutality?)

Response: *ndio* (yes) (emphatically)

The positive response by the hearer indicated to the speaker that the utterances were relevant to the hearer. Relevance of these utterances is anchored in the intention of the speaker. The utterances, having been rendered in a pre-election campaign speech for the 2013 General Elections in Kenya are intended by the speaker to depict the speaker’s political coalition (Coalition for Reforms and Democracy – CORD) and those who support them as victims of political violence perpetuated by government-allied agencies. It should be noted that the rival political coalitions, JUBILEE and AMANI Coalitions, were already packaged as the Pro-Government coalitions and therefore in the 2013 campaigns, particularly JUBILEE was seen to represent the then Government. The effectiveness of the context so created by the speaker in making the hate speech message relevant to the hearer was enhanced by the atmosphere of change already created by the speaker in the introductory utterances as captured below:

Speaker 1: *Tarehe nne mwezi wa Machi mwaka huu tutaona kivumbi. Kivumbi ya kuleta Kenya mpya ... Tumekuja manaake sisi kama Wakenya tunataka mabadiliko. Sio?* (On fourth of March this year we shall see a cyclone. A cyclone to bring new Kenya ... we have come because

we as Kenyans we want change. Isn't that so?

Response: *Eeh.* (Yes)

In this excerpt, the speaker describes the forthcoming general election as a '*...kivumbi; Kivumbi ya kuleta Kenya mpya...*' (...cyclone; A cyclone to bring a new Kenya...). The speaker's political coalition (CORD) is being depicted as the agent of this cyclone for change while the rival political coalitions (JUBILEE and AMANI), by implication, are pro-status quo. The speaker is utilizing two shared contexts: a context created by the speaker in which people want change and the context of injustices against the people during the 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence to advance the hate message on the ideology of 'Us against Them'. Notice that in both cases, the speaker is using a dialogue structure of question and answer to confirm if the message he intends to communicate is relevant to the audience. Affirmative response from the hearer is used to determine the acceptance of the propositions in the utterance by the hearer; an indication that the utterances are relevant to the hearer. We can therefore conclude that the speaker has used past political events known to the audience to create a shared context for the utterances and thereby make the utterances on hate speech relevant to the hearer. This is further evident in the utterances below:

Speaker 6: This election can only be compared to the election of 1963...

Response: *Ndio Baba* (Yes Father)

Speaker 6: For fifty years, Kenyans have wandered in the wilderness... they now have an opportunity... to change the course of history... the struggle has been long... that is how we can explain the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto... Thomas Joseph Mboya... J. M. Karuiki, to mention but a few... *tunataka kumaliza utawala wa kiimla, tunataka kumaliza ufisadi, tunataka kumaliza unyakuzi wa ardhi... nimehesabu Wakenya ambao waliwawa kinyama. Mtoto wa nyoka ni nini?* (...we want to end dictatorship, we want to end corruption, we want to end illegal land grabbing... I have counted Kenyans who were brutally murdered. The child of a snake is?)

Response: *Nyoka* (Snake) (Intensive blowing of vuvuzela and cheering)

In these utterances, the speaker who belongs to CORD Coalition uses past events of assassinations in Kenya to create a context intended to manipulate the mind-set of the hearer to make the hearer feel insecure if the presidential candidate of JUBILEE Coalition wins the election. The hate speech message in these utterances is anchored on the premise that these assassinations were carried out during the reign of the First President of the Republic of Kenya who happens to be the biological father of the JUBILEE Coalition presidential candidate. Thus, by implication, the speaker is cautioning the hearer that if the JUBILEE presidential candidate wins the forthcoming election, then like his father, he will perpetuate atrocities like political assassinations and brutal killings. This is hate speech intended to set the hearer against the JUBILEE presidential candidate. Again in these political utterances, the hate speech is advanced within a context specifically created and manipulated by the speaker as informative component of the utterances.

Manipulation of context to achieve relevance in the utterances while advancing hate speech based on the ideology of 'Us against Them' is in speaker's use of the personal pronoun. Leech and Svartvik (1986) describe pronouns as words which function as whole noun phrase; and that most pronouns act as substitutes or replacements for noun phrases in the context in which they have been used. Of relevance to this paper is the use of the personal pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'they' in the political utterances on hate speech. Hakansson (2012) observes that the

pronoun 'we' when used in political speeches expresses 'institutional identity'. It depicts the speaker as a representative of or speaking on behalf of an institution. A speaker uses 'we' to create a divisive impression of 'us' from 'them' and thereby easy to give a positive picture of the group he/she belongs to while the other group is depicted negatively. Consider the following utterances in which pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'they' have been used:

Speaker 5: *Waambiwe haiwezekani tena kikundi cha watu wachache mno ndio walala hai na sisi ni walala hoi... tuwe vigilant kabisa kwa sababu hatutaki safari hii kura zimeibwa...* (They should be told that never again shall a very small group of people are rich and the rest of us are poor... let us be so vigilant because we don't want this time round our votes to be stolen again...)

The first person pronoun 'sisi' (us) and 'tu' (we) in 'ha-tu-taki' [neg.-we-want] in the above excerpt are used by the speaker to refer to both the speaker and the hearer as belonging to the same institution. An impression of 'them' against 'us' is created by the speaker's use of the pronoun 'wa' (they) in the verb phrase 'waambiwe' (they should be told) and it is enhanced by the speaker's description of 'they' as just a small group of people who are economically able, exploitative and steals votes to acquire political power; while the speaker's political coalition constitutes people who are poor and exploited and now 'championing for justice' in Kenya. Remember, the speaker is a member of the political elite class and therefore in actual fact, he is economically wealthy. Therefore, in order to fulfil the hearer's expectation of relevance in his utterances, he uses an all-inclusive first person plural pronoun to break the class barrier between him and the hearer. Thus, the use of 'sisi' (us) and 'tu' (we) creates a shared imaginary context (psychological) that subverts the social order and creates a false one in which the hearer and the speaker share a socio-economic class. This creates a context upon which the hate message in the utterance is made relevant to the hearer

As explained by van Dijk (1998), use of contrastive dimension of 'Us versus Them' helps articulate mental representations which yield into building of ideological frameworks of power relations with one group (Us) presenting itself in positive terms, and the other (Them) in negative terms. In this context, the politician has used the 'Us and Them' dimension to advance hate speech message and achieve relevance of the utterance.

The role of context in interpretation of political utterances on hate speech is also evident in establishing the possible intended speaker meaning. In this sense, context is utilized by the speaker as an ostensive stimulus as seen in the utterances below:

Speaker 1: *...sio wale wa kusema na kutenda...kuiba ndiyo unajua zaidi halafu unasema kusema na kutenda* (...not like those of 'talk and do'...stealing is what you know best and then you claim you 'talk and do').

The referent/person against whom the hate message in the above utterance targets is not identified in the utterance. A search for the referent within the co-text of the utterance (as intra-textual analysis) neither establishes the referent of the hate speech by anaphoric nor cataphoric reference resolution. However, an extra-textual analysis of the utterance establishes a non-linguistic context surrounding the utterance. The non-linguistic textual analysis is necessary as supported by Sperber and Wilson (1986) in Relevance Theory that an utterance needs to be interpreted within both the linguistic and non-linguistic context in which it exists. Where a speaker has not provided sufficient evidence in form of ostensive stimuli within the utterance, the cognitive principle of relevance holds it that the hearer's mind will search for relevant contextual assumptions around the utterance and this process may include searching

into the non-linguistic text of the utterance (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). Thus, in the above utterance, the hearer is compelled to get into inter-textual analysis of previous events to retrieve both linguistic and non-linguistic assumptions relevant to the political phrase '*kusema na kutenda*' (talk and do). The phrase '*kusema na kutenda*' (talk and do [talk and execute what you talk about by actions]) is a political slogan for United Republican Party (URP), a political party in the JUBILEE Coalition. The phrase is associated with the URP Party leader William Ruto who coined the slogan. Whenever the phrase is used in political circles, it is used to make reference to the URP Party leader. Therefore, as used by the speaker in the utterance above, the implied referent is the URP Party leader. In these utterances, the speaker describes the referent as a person who has perfected the art of stealing by saying '*kuiba ndio unajua zaidi*' (stealing is what you know best). The speaker deliberately fails to mention the referent NP is in the subject position as shown below:

'...[missing NP] *kuiba ndio unajua zaidi alafu unasema kusema na kutenda*' (...[missing NP] stealing is what you know best and then you say 'to talk and to do [take action])

However, the hearer is able to recover the missing NP from previous linguistic and non-linguistic contexts using the assumptions generated by the slogan '*kusema na kutenda*' (to talk and to take action). The past linguistic and non-linguistic contexts of the utterance in this case act as an ostensive stimulus which guides the hearer to the speaker meaning. The role of context as an ostensive stimulus in such an utterance is very important considering the fluidity of the utterance in eliciting multiple pragmatic interpretations because the missing NP.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to establish the role of context in interpretation of political utterances that contain hate speech messages in Kenya using data of selected political utterances extracted from pre-election campaign speeches for the 2013 General Elections in Kenya. This paper has established that in order to enhance communication of the hate messages to the hearer, politicians use context to create a shared background with the hearer upon which the hate message is delivered. This is achieved through recount of past events which the hearer is familiar with and once this is done the speaker then advances the intended hate speech message.

The paper has also established that context is used to achieve relevance of the political utterance to the hearer. Where this is evident, the speaker manipulates context to achieve relevance. Manipulation of context is most evident in utterances which contain hate speech messages advancing the ideology of 'Us against Them' based on context that subverts the social class order.

One characteristic of political utterances on hate speech is their fluidity in eliciting multiple pragmatic interpretations. For the hearer to identify the possible intended speaker meaning, such an utterance must be interpreted guided by an ostensive stimuli provided by the speaker. This paper has established that context in an ostensive stimulus used by politicians to guide the hearer to the possible intended speaker meaning. This is more evident in political utterance on hate speech with a missing NP in the subject position. In such utterances, context as ostensive stimulus is necessary for the retrieval of the missing NP as the referent targeted by the hate speech.

While in this paper the discussions has identified some of the roles of context in the interpretation of political utterances on hate speech in Kenya and discussed each role in isolation,

it needs to be noted that the role of context in utterances is multifaceted. Utterances in which context can be interpreted to play more than one role, the different roles operate mutually and simultaneously in the utterance to realize utterance meaning.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. by Vern, W. McGee. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2013). *Understanding Utterances*. Retrieved from [http://pubpages.unpubpages.unh.edu/~jds/Bakhtin utterance.htm](http://pubpages.unpubpages.unh.edu/~jds/Bakhtin%20utterance.htm). Downloaded on 12th July, 2013.
- Bayram, F. (2000). *Ideology and Political Discourse*. Retrieved from [research.ncl.ac.uk/ARECLS/volume7 /bayram-vol7.pdf](http://research.ncl.ac.uk/ARECLS/volume7/bayram-vol7.pdf). Downloaded on 20th August, 2013.
- Blass, R. (1990). *Relevance Relations in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eagleton, T. (2000). *Ideology*. *Journal of Language and Politics*. Vol. 6:1. U.S.A; John Benjamins Publishing Company. Downloaded from [www.lang.lancs.ac.uk/staff/wodak/papers/ideology\\_jlp.pdf](http://www.lang.lancs.ac.uk/staff/wodak/papers/ideology_jlp.pdf).
- Eugene, E. O. (2004). *What is An Utterance?* Retrieved from [www.Sil.Org/Linguistics/Glossary of Linguistic terms/WhatIsAnUtterance.htm](http://www.Sil.Org/Linguistics/Glossary%20of%20Linguistic%20terms/WhatIsAnUtterance.htm). Downloaded on 8th Sept. 2013.
- Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in The Way of Words*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Habwe, J. H. (1999). *Discoursr Analysis of Swahili Political Speeches*. University of Nairobi: Unpublished PhD thesis.
- Hakansson, J. (2012). *The Use of Personal Pronouns in Political Speeches*. Retrieved from [www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:531167/fulltext01.pdf](http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:531167/fulltext01.pdf). Downloaded on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.
- Leech, G., and Svartvik, J. (1986). *A Communicative Grammar of English*. Singapore: Longman.
- National Cohesion and Integration Commission. (2010). *Guidelines for Monitoring Hate Speech in the Electronic Media in Kenya*. Retrieved from [www.cohesion.or.ke/~cohesion/images/downloads/guidelines%2520monitoring%2520](http://www.cohesion.or.ke/~cohesion/images/downloads/guidelines%2520monitoring%2520). Downloaded 22nd Oct. 2014
- Odongo, M. (2010). *Unpacking Hate Speech*. Retrieved from [www.cohesion.or.ke/.../144-unpacking-hate-speech-by-commissioner-milly...](http://www.cohesion.or.ke/.../144-unpacking-hate-speech-by-commissioner-milly...) Downloaded on 20th Feb. 2014.
- Perlmutter, P. (1999). *Legacy of Hate*. Retrieved from <http://books.google.co.ke/books>. Downloaded on 30th Oct. 2014.
- Potts, C. (2005). [www.Staford.edu/class/linguist130a-handout-01-17-sentproputt.pdf](http://www.Staford.edu/class/linguist130a-handout-01-17-sentproputt.pdf).
- Sperber, D., and Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Oxford: Basill Blackwall.
- Sperber, D., and Wilson, D. (1995). *Postface to the Second Edition of Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Dijk, V. T. (1997). *What is Political Discourse Analysis?*. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*. Vol. 11, p11-52.
- Wodak, R. (2007). *Language and Ideology*. *Journal of Language and Politics*. Vol. 6:1. U.S.A; John Benjamins Publishing Company. Retrieved from [www.lang.lancs.ac.uk/staff/wodak/papers/ideology\\_jlp.pdf](http://www.lang.lancs.ac.uk/staff/wodak/papers/ideology_jlp.pdf). Downloaded on 20th Sept. 2013.