

A Linguistic Analysis of Representation of Corruption and Corruption-Related Clauses in Kenyan Print Media



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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to examine how language is used to represent the menace of corruption in Kenyan Print Media. Corruption has become a burning issue in Kenya as a country and in organizational research. It has been a long-standing debate in the Kenyan political and economic sphere, relevant not only at the national level but also having impact in rural areas where county governments were introduced through the 2010 constitution. However, few studies examine how corruption issue is socially constructed linguistically in print media. The study examines all reportage on corruption as a social issue in the *Daily newspaper* and the *Standard Newspaper* from February 2020 to February 2021. The study applied Fairclough's (1989, 1990, 2001) Critical Discourse Analysis theoretical framework. The study employed analytical research design. The findings of the study revealed the use of linguistic elements that advance and amplify the reporting on corruption related issues. Such elements include the use of lexical items such as nouns and verbs, voice, epithets and indigenization. The results show that messages on corruption are framed in a persuasive manner to influence the readers and to evoke thoughts on this menace that has hardly affected the taxpayers. The study concludes that language is a powerful tool that newspaper writers use to influence the readers and to evoke thoughts on corruption that has hardly affected the taxpayers.

KEYWORDS: Corruption, Critical discourse Analysis, Linguistic elements, Kenyan Print Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The current paper is rooted in the field of critical linguistics and more specifically critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Foucault, 1972; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1997). CDA focuses on spoken and written language as crucial parts of the social processes through which different conceptions of corruption are (re)produced and transformed. Werlin (1973) defines corruption as the use of public office for private needs. Johnstone (1997) considers corruption to be abuse of public roles and resources for private benefit. Blackburn, Bose & Haque (2004) on the other hand defines corruption as an illegal or unauthorized profiteering by officials who exploit their positions for personal gain. Lange (2008) states that; corruption involves the pursuit of interests through a misdirection of organizational resources, at either the individual or the collective level. Worth noting is that corruption is an important social phenomena that affects private and public organization (Pinto et al., 2008). Therefore, it does not matter whether it is undertaken as single act of misbehavior or as part of normalized practices in or among organizations.

Kenya is seen as a high-risk country economically due to corruption. In fact, Kenyans top notch economists argue that Kenya's competitiveness is held back by high corruption levels that penetrate every sector of the economy. In the Corruption Perception Index from the Transparency International (2020), Kenya is ranked 124th out of 179 countries for corruption, tied with Azerbaijan, Mexico, Bolivia and Kyrgyztan (least corrupt countries are at the top of the list). Most bribes paid by urban residents in Kenya are fairly small but large ones are also taken – bribes worth over 50,000 Kenyan shillings (€600, US\$700) account for 41% of the total value. There is also corruption on a larger scale with each of the last two regimes being criticized for their involvement. Thelander (2005) observes that money gained out of corruption does not trickle down to the people nor is it used to make smart investments, instead it is used for private gain to import luxurious goods. This then implies that corruption hinders economic development and it slows down the democratic process and stability in a political system.

The Jubilee administration under President Uhuru Kenyatta's second term did little in 2019 to change this perception, with multi-billion shilling scandals hitting the headlines at an alarming record. Despite market reforms, several business surveys reveal that business corruption is still widespread and that companies frequently encounter demands for bribes and informal payments to 'get things done' in Kenya. The public procurement sector in Kenya suffers widespread corruption. The use of agents to facilitate

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business operations and transactions in Kenya is widespread and poses a risk for companies, particularly at the market entry and business start-up stage. Ombati (2020) also observes that in the surveys that were carried out in Kenya bribery and nepotism are the most prevalent forms of corruption. Despite positive developments, the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission (KACC) was disbanded in 2011 and replaced by the newly instated Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission. Observers describe the new agency as superficial and moreover real progress in the fight against corruption is much more nuanced. The constant ranking of the country's stagnation at the bottom and the feeling among the population of an increasing level of corruption in recent by the corruption Perception Index from the Transparency International raises questions of the role of different institutions in the fight against corruption with the focus on Kenyan Print Media.

Nilsson (2009) studies Corruption in Kenya by focusing on Individual Attitudes and Actions towards Corruption in Nakuru, Kenya. The study revealed that no matter what social standing respondents belonged to they all saw corruption as something negative and destroying for the country's development. Kipchirchir (2017) shows that the existence of the legal and institutional frameworks for combating corruption provides a credible opportunity for dealing with corruption. Van Rij (2021) study show that corruption results from a confusion of public and private interests that is specific to the neo-patrimonial logic in place since British colonization. The above literature review reveal that corruption menace has been a long-standing debate in the Kenyan political and economic sphere, relevant not only at the national level but also having impact in rural areas where county governments were introduced through the 2010 constitution. However, few studies examine how corruption issue is socially constructed linguistically in print media. Thus, there seems to be lack of understanding of how corruption is socially and discursively constructed by use of language.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the complexity of corruption by analyzing the discursive construction of corruption in the Kenyan print media. The study focused on how the media use language to represent the issue of corruption to the audience. According to Hall (1997) representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. The media communication provides an avenue through which a person learns of the world outside his or her immediate experience (Barak, 1994). The media disseminates and creates images in peoples mind (Kellner, 1995) which shapes the audience's views and opinions of the world's value; which include what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Nonetheless, how the media represents social issues greatly determines how their audiences may understand and support them (Picard, 1998). The role of the media is to serve as watchdogs of the citizens in the society (Fairclough, 2003). Thus, it is expected that the media uncovers and report problematic events especially in the recent time where Kenyans hear more and more of high profiled cases of corruption scandals. This study investigated the discursive interplays and shifts undertaken in the media representations of the controversies and facts on corruption issues in Kenya.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as propounded by Fairclough (1989, 1992, and 1993). Various scholars argue that CDA sees language as part of social practice (Lemke 1995, Janks 1997; Van Dijk 1998). CDA aims to uncover power relations and associated ideologies in texts and how these are reflected by the socio-historical context of the text. Language as a social practice entails recognizing that there are three dimensions to any discursive instance such as the newspapers (Cf. Fairclough, 1989). That is; the text, the interaction and the context. Thus, CDA involves three stages description of the discourses as text; interpretation of the discourses as interaction, that is, between text and human subjects; and explanation of the discourse as social action. Thus, an analysis of Kenyan print media on corruption entails first analyzing the structure of the text and the linguistic choices made by the writer. Secondly, the analysis includes examining the process of production of the text by the writer and the process of interpretation whereby the reader makes sense of what the text is about. Thirdly, the analysis considers the social conditions that possibly influence and possibly are influenced by the processes of production and interpretation of each of the editorials. Fairclough's three stages of discourse analysis are seen as three interrelated stages.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted analytical research design (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999, Cresswell, 2012). According to Omair (2015) analytical research is a specific type of research that involves critical thinking skills and the evaluation of facts and information relative to the research being conducted. The target population for this study was the Daily *Nation* and the *Standard* Newspapers articles on corruption issues produced between the months February 2020 to and February 2021. During the year 2020 there were so many instances of corruption issues in the country that were captured in the newspapers. The data was therefore gained by exploring and browsing the resources of two newspapers. The headlines and editorials are taken randomly from the newspapers as per the period of time designated. The data therefore consisted of a corpus of sentences which were selected and organized according to the levels of analysis used.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The features of language used in the representation of corruption in Kenyan printmedia

This section focuses on language use in the representation of corruption and corruption-related clauses in Kenyan print media. The section establishes how language represents the corruption related themes in the Newspaper publications (Nation and Standard). The focus is on representation of corruption related issues through language, where language in this context refers to the written elements used in the communication process. The analysis is therefore in terms of: lexical features in the headlines, linguistic features in the editorials (Cliches and Epithets) and indigenization of English in the editorials.

4.1.1 Lexical features in Newspaper headlines in representation of corruption

The data collected reveals special methods of using words in captioning headlines in order to attract the attention of the readers, or to exhibit the editorial inclination (policy) of the newspaper(s) they represent. Headlines form a very important part of a newspaper. Rea (1998) observes that headlines have the capacity to encapsulate a story, and the headlines in a particular edition give the readers the overall picture of the current news. Lexical features in the current study entails the how the choice of words, phrases or expressions (diction) in the headlines are selected for representation of corruption related themes. The lexical features that were examined include nouns, verbs and voice.

The study established nouns were frequently used in the data collected. The noun is a word that can occur as a subject or object of a verb or can be the object of a preposition. An adjective can also modify a noun and used with determiners. Nouns are defined as a person, place or thing. Nouns were used to bring out corruption related themes as shown in the analysis below:

Headline 1: Audit reveals sh4bn loss at Uwezo fund

Date: Daily Nation Wednesday, July 28, 2021

Nouns: Audit, sh4bn, fund

Headline 2: Judges found with sh6bn, Officer tells Court **Date:** Daily Nation, July 30, 2021

Nouns: Judges, Officer, Court

Headline 3: Court declines to postpone corruption case facing Kidero

Date: Daily Nation, Thursday 2021.

Nouns: Court, Corruption, Kidero

Headline 4: Haji: Big fish using courts to delay Case

Date: Daily Nation, Wednesday, June 21, 2021

Nouns: Fish, courts, Case

Headline 5: Corruption in Education section will blight our Children

Date: Standard Newspaper, Tuesday, June 2021

Nouns: Corruption, Children

The above data shows headlines that utilize the use of Nouns (N) and Noun Phrases (NP) to tell stories. In headline 1. **Audit reveals sh4bn loss at Uwezo fund** the main lexical items are **audit**, **sh 4bn** and **uwezo fund** that represent the theme of corruption. The words are loaded to heighten the menace of corruption in Kenya. Uwezo fund is a flagship programme for vision 2030 that was meant to enable women, youth and persons with disabilities access finances to promote their businesses, thus, igniting the loss **sh4bn** loss by use of nouns makes the headline attract the attention of the reader. The NP **audit**, **sh 4bn** and **fund** words carry particular strong connotation about the level of corruption in Kenya. Headline 2. **Judges found with sh6bn, Officer tells Court** similarly show the level of corruption in Kenya through nouns. The Nouns **Judges**, **Officer** and **Court** carry a lot of content that attracts the reader to read the story. The judges are the theme of this sentence and so the focus of the headline. The nouns function as a sign post for what to the reader thinks of the judges before reading a story. It is indeed ironical that the **judges** are being accused by officers for receiving a bribe of **sh6bn**. Thus, the key words **Judges**, **Officer** and **Court** are used to grab attention from readers.

Headline 3 heightens the menace of corruption itself in **Court declines to postpone corruption case facing Kidero**. The NPs in this headline are **Court**, **Corruption**, and **Kidero**. The use of personal pronoun aims to attract the attention of the news since in Kenya. Kidero is a former governor of Nairobi County. Thus, this headline acts as a notice of what it presupposes before reading a news story. Headline 4 closely relates to 3 where a proper noun is also used **Haji: Big fish using courts to delay case**. The proper Noun **Haji** is likely to attract the attention of the reader since the mentioned person is the DPP (Director of Public Prosecutions) of Kenya and is known for his efforts in the fight against corruption. The constant frequency of the occurrence of the words **court** and **corruption** paint the courts in Kenya as a derailing factor in the fight against corruption. In fact, the words serve as a foundation to other words or expressions in all the headlines for the study as further illustrated in headline 5: **Corruption in Education Section will blight our children**. Thus, the use of the word **corruption** grabs the attention from a news reader. In fact, headlines have an important role in attracting readers to buy a newspaper and read them. Headline 1 to 5 is meant to attract and fascinate the readers

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to read a newspaper when they look at the headlines. Corruption being a major problem to the economy of Kenya is thus constructed by journalist using linguistic features such as nouns.

The second lexical item that is analyzed in headlines is Verbs. The verb is an important lexical category in English since it carries markers of grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, person, number and mood and refers to an action. The analyzed data show that verbs are one of the most used words in Kenyan print media and more so in headlines. First, the analyzed data reveal that most headlines in Kenyan Print media reveal both the present and past tense time as shown below:

6. Audit *reveals* sh4bn loss at Uwezo fund (Present Tense)V
7. Judges *found* with sh6bn, Officer tells Court (Past Tense)V
8. Court *declines* to postpone corruption case facing Kidero (Present Tense)

The verbs in the headlines above are action verbs. 87% of the headlines collected made use of Present tense, for immediate past information, past tense for past perfect, and future tense for coming events as shown below:

9. Court *freezes* property of former KRA staff worth sh192m over graft claim
10. Haji *lays* bare status of high profile cases amid differences with Kinoti

The headline uses the verb *freezes* in a special way to intensify the fight against corruption

Another linguistic feature that is prominent in newspaper headlines is the use of active voice. The headlines involve the use logical sentence structure, active voice and strong present-tense verbs as shown in the headline 9 and 10 above. The emphasis is on the agent who performs an action as in headline 9 and 10 the emphasis is on the doer of the action that is the **court** and **Haji**. Thus, the verb shows the person or thing performing the action and which can take a direct object. The active voice is used to make the headlines more forceful, direct, and clear.

4.1.2 Linguistic features in the editorials

A newspaper editorial is as an article that contributes to a debate on a timely topic. It convincingly interprets the news, using various persuasive devices, making legitimate play on the readers' instincts and emotions. The analyzed data reveal the following linguistic features: clichés and epithets.

The examined data show the use clichés in the headlines and editorials. A cliché is "a hackneyed or overused phrase or opinion". McArthur (1992) defines Clichés as another type of journalese found in newspaper language. Clichés are derived from or are favored by newspaper writing, especially in relation to groups that be stereotyped. The analysis below show the use of cliché in the editorials:

Headline 11: Audit reveals sh4bn loss at Uwezo fund **Date:** Daily Nation Wednesday, July 28, 2021

Clichés used: Everything was smooth, -Something was a miss, -Massive mismanagement of funds, -Breaking of procurement laws, -Unexplained payments, -Dubious characters, -Widespread misrepresentation of facts, -Taxpayers staring at huge losses, -long suffering by tax payer

Headline 12: Judges found with sh6bn, Officer tells Court **Date:** Daily Nation, July 30, 2021

Clichés used: Dramatized arrest, -Police officers stormed in chambers, -After a series of meeting
-Officers tipped that, -Occupants resulted into seizure among others

Headline 13: Haji: Big fish using courts to delay case **Date:** Daily Nation, Wednesday, June 21, 2021

Clichés used: High Profile Kenyans, Mastered the art of manipulating, Seal any gaps slowing down the wheels of justice

Headline 14: Corruption in Education Section will bight our Children **Date:** Standard Newspaper, Tuesday, June 2021

Clichés used: poverty porn inspired type of story, bagging medals, grabbed land, a conduit for corruption, money spinner and conveyor belt

Headline 15: Court told how scheme to defraud sh2.6 from Migori was unearthed

Date: Standard Newspaper, Monday August 30, 2021

Clichés used: Proxies, Massive fraud, well planned conspiracy, Conflict of interest

The editorials convincingly interpret the news, using various persuasive devices, making legitimate play on the reader's instincts and emotions. The data above show the use of the various types of clichés made of emotive words in order to convince the reader. They can be in form of phrases or certain syntactic forms that occur so regularly as to be clichés. For instance, in the article *Audit reveals sh4bn loss at Uwezo fund* the writer uses clichés to represent corruption as shown with phrases such as -*Something was amiss*, -*Massive mismanagement of funds*, -*Breaking of procurement laws*, -*Unexplained payments*, -*Dubious characters*, -*Widespread misrepresentation of facts*, -*Taxpayers staring at huge losses and long suffering by tax payer*. The phrases in this article magnify corruption as a menace in Kenya.

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In the headline „*Judges found with sh6bn, Officer tells Court*’ the data show the vivid description of events as depicted with the phrases *Dramatized arrest* and *Police officers stormed in chambers*. The examined cliché also show the combined efforts put in an effort to fight corruption, - *a series of meeting*, the role of officers as in *officers tipped that and occupants resulted into seizure among others*.

The data collected also show syntactic forms which occur regularly that they are in the cliché category; for example, in the headline *Corruption in Education Section will blight our children* and *Court told how scheme to defraud sh2.6b from Migori was unearthed* reveal clichés such as „a money spinner“, „Conveyer belt“ and „grabbed property“, long suffering taxpayer“, „Massive fraud“ „well planned conspiracy“ and -Conflict of interest. All this cliché’s relate to the theme of corruption. The findings on cliché reveal that newspaper writers use emotive language send corruption messages to the public. They communicate to the readers through through publication of stories about corruption, giving them distinct prominence and a wide coverage. Cliches in the study expose corrupt incidences in government institutions and senior public officers who have been represented as high profile individuals who are presented as the main culprits of corrupt practices. In this case, the government officials have been presented negatively.

The data collected reveal the use of epithets. An epithet is a noun used as an adjective to describe sb/sth’s character or most important quality, especially in order to give praise or criticism. It can also be “an offensive word or phrase that is used about a person or a group of people”. An epithet can be an expression added to a name as a characterizing description, before it as in „glorious (McArthur (1992). McArthur states that epithets can be a plain adjective or other descriptive word. The data below gives examples of epithets examined in the data collected.

Headline 16: The riddle of water shortage in Nairobi Date: Daily Nation August 30, 2021

Epithets: Water Shortage, water browses, water vendors, age-old, biting hostages

Headline 17: The puzzle of city Hall’s huge black hole and one man pocketing millions. **Date:** Standard Newspaper Thursday August 13, 2021

Epithets: Shadowy business, super-deal-maker, Alcoholic fund, Whooping sh119 million

Headline 18: Kenya becomes playground of investment con artists **Date:** Daily Nation Monday, June, 28, 2021

Epithets: gullible investors, con artists, master minds, Gullible Kenyans, Painful investment losses, Quick riches, lavish lifestyle, Frustrated investors

The data above reveal various types of epithets. From the article with the headline „*The riddle of water shortage in Nairobi*“ the data reveal epithets where the noun „water“ was used as an adjective as in the phrases „Water shortage“ „Water bowsers“ and „Water vendors“. Age and bitings were also used as epithets to describe corruption in the water sector. In the article „*The puzzle of city Hall’s huge black hole and one man pocketing millions*’ there were simple epithets of an adjective and noun as in Shadowy business and -super-deal-maker to show corruption at the city hall. „Super-deal-maker“ is an epithet that comprises of a string of words. Moreover, some epithets comprised of a noun and noun as in Alcoholic’s fund and - Alcohol fund. A gerund was also used to emphasize on the amount of money that was lost to an individual in the phrase –Whooping sh119 million. The article ‘*Kenya becomes playground of investment con artists*’ describes how Kenyans lose money through pyramid school that have infringed the market due to corruption. Some of the epithets made of an adjective and a noun that show the gullibility of Kenyan are gullible investors and gullible Kenyans. More epithets that describe corruption through pyramid schemes include „con artists“ „master minds“ „Painful investment losses’ Quick riches“ lavish lifestyle frustrated investors and -taskforce investigation. The use of epithets is seen as persuasive language which can easily win over the reader.

The data collected reveal both Nation and standard newspapers use language that has African flavor. Such a strategy is called indigenization. McArthur (1992) describes indigenization as the phenomenon where English takes place as African language in the registers of politics, business, the media, and popular culture. Thus, indigenization of English entails the use of foregrounding with the resultant aesthetic and thematic effects. In the data, this phenomenon is manifested in loan words from local languages, extension of meaning of English and local language words as shown in the analysis below:

Headline 19: Parents lose millions in sponsorship scam

Date: Daily Nation Tuesday, August 10, 2021

Indigenized words:

Headline 20: Investors lose billions in Cytonn Chama” com

Date: Daily Nation, Friday June 18, 2021

Indigenized words: Chama

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Headline 21: We live in darkness despite hosting Shs6b power project, residents say

Date: Daily Nation, Friday July 14,2021

Locals words: Koroboi

The two articles in table above on gullible Kenyans reveal the use of indigenization of English in the editorials. Article 19 'Parents lose millions in sponsorship scam' show extensions of meaning in the word eyeing and bridge while article 20 show the used of borrowed word 'chama' from local dialect Kiswahili to mean a group. The use of indigenization of English in the editorials is meant to draw the reader near to the subject. In the headline „We live in darkness despite hosting Shs6b power project, residents say the extract below show the use of indigenized term '**Koroboi**' to emphasize on the editors message as shown:

Most of residents of Lorogon with a population of 2400 are forced to use solar and traditional lanterns (**Koroboi**)

The bolded term '**Koroboi**' is local and too Kenyan to the audience. In Kenya it is also associated with poverty.

5. CONCLUSION

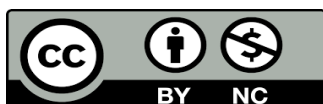
The current study investigated the construction of corruption from a CDA perspective in Kenyan print media. The study shows the use of linguistic features to represent the social evil of corruption. The data also revealed the use of indigenization in Kenyan print media to contextualize the news reported and interpretation. The study concludes that the use of unique features in the headlines and editorials amplifies the reporting on corruption cases. The analysis also shows that the newspapers presented the corrupt messages by drawing from lexical and grammatical choices. The data reveal that editors mainly used epithets that negatively depicted high profile individuals and agencies as corrupt. Topicalization and the active and passive voice were also used to focus on agents and social actors or minimize the same as appropriate in the context. The use of language uniquely enabled the editors to highlight the topical issues at the time in regard to corruption. In summary, the linguistic choices used by the editors framed the messages corruption in a persuasive manner to influence the readers and to evoke thoughts on this menace that has hardly affected the taxpayers.

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