



Article

A linguistic analysis of inclusiveness and exclusion in Kenya's Mau Forest conservation discourse

Albert Mogambi-Moinani

Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

E-mail: albert.mogambi@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper critically analyses the use of personal pronouns in the political discourse surrounding the Mau Forest conservation debate in Kenya. Using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, the paper analyses the use of pronominal reference and its implications for forest conservation in the county. The argument is that the personal pronouns that speakers, especially political leaders, choose to use serve specific rhetorical functions meant to achieve selfish predetermined ends. Such ends could be either to persuade their hearers to accept the speakers' propositions because they belong to the same group (inclusiveness), or reject others' propositions because they do not belong to the speakers' group (exclusion/othering). The study analysed 50 utterances from key political leaders on the Mau Forest conservation programme. These utterances were extracted from the main electronic media in the country. Studying pronominal reference as a device of inclusiveness and exclusion (othering) is therefore important since it will shed light on the connection between language and forest conservation. Revealing this connection will empower the public, government, policymakers and other stakeholders to make informed decisions in regard to the issue of forest conservation in the country. Consequently, they will take appropriate action on forest conservation matters for the common good of all.

Keywords: pronominal reference; inclusiveness; othering; discourse; forest conservation; Kenya

1. Introduction

Pronominal reference is a key language feature of persuasion. Speakers usually use this

feature to encode the ideology of inclusiveness and exclusion (otherness) during debate on sensitive or controversial issues in society. The personal pronouns that speakers choose to use serve to persuade their hearers to either accept their propositions because they belong to the same group (inclusiveness) or reject those of others who do not belong to the in-group (exclusion/otherness). Accepting or rejecting propositions in this context has implications for the conservation of the Mau Forest.

The Mau Forest is Kenya's largest water tower spreading over four hundred thousand hectares. It is the single most important water catchment in Rift Valley and western Kenya (Ministry of Environment, 2010). The Mau Forest complex regulates water flow, controls flooding, regulates groundwater recharge and mitigates climate change by storing carbon. It is, therefore, an important heritage locally and globally; hence, it needs to be protected. However, encroachment on the Mau Forest area has led to the rampant degradation of this common heritage, thus threatening the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as universal health, a clean environment and food security for all. This implies that conservation of this important heritage requires the collaborative efforts of all, regardless of political, ideological or cultural orientation.

However, the pronominal reference that political leaders chose to use during the Mau Forest conservation debate seemed to be aimed at creating opposing camps between the different stakeholders in the country. Political leaders used pronouns to persuade their hearers to accept the speakers' propositions because they belonged to the same group, or reject others' propositions because they did not belong to the speakers' group. This scenario presents the Mau Forest conservation issue as a contest between different ideological camps, thus threatening the well-being of the Mau Forest as a common heritage. This is dangerous since it will ultimately lead to ecological disasters unless appropriate action is taken before it is too late.

Political leaders in this study used a number of personal pronouns in their speeches to address their followers on the Mau Forest conservation programme. These speeches were made during political campaigns in the build-up towards the general elections in Kenya. The pronouns included 'I/me', 'we/us', and 'you/they'. The frequency of these pronouns in the Mau Forest conservation discourse is statistically significant and representative of the major ideologies of inclusiveness and exclusion/othering underpinning the Mau Forest discourse.

The political leaders used these pronouns to identify themselves with the masses so as to win their support and subsequently drive their political agenda with ease (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Mercer, 2000) while distancing those with opposing views and portraying them negatively. This implies that speakers were concerned more with endearing themselves to the people so as to influence their beliefs and attitudes towards forest conservation while isolating those with divergent opinions about forest conservation for selfish reasons.

The personal pronoun 'I' indicates the speaker's authority or power over the audience (Beard, 2000). In this context, speakers used the pronoun to portray themselves as

individuals with the correct information and perception about the Mau Forest issue. This perception, arguably, gave them power/authority to inform and direct the public on the viewpoint they should adopt as far as the Mau Forest conservation issue is concerned. Uses of the personal pronoun 'I' serve to indicate that the speaker views himself as self-important, placing himself above the collective responsibility of other colleagues. As such, the speaker ought to be trusted to inform, direct, guide or lead the audience in the process of decision-making about issues such as the Mau Forest restoration. Consequently, the public ought to ignore and resist those with opposing viewpoints. According to Wodak (2009), such language use makes a speaker authoritatively convincing, hence making it possible for such a speaker to persuade the public to form opinions favourable to his or her predetermined ends (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Similarly, van Dijk (1998) and Chilton (2004) aver that speakers use language to portray themselves positively so as to persuade their hearers to accept the viewpoints they espouse.

The use of the personal pronoun 'I' in combination with the semantic category of mental verbs such as 'think' and 'know' indicates that the speaker is rational or reasonable (Beard, 2000). That is, the viewpoint that the speaker in this context advances in regard to the Mau Forest conservation issue is well thought-out, hence reliable. Therefore, people should ignore those with divergent opinions (you/they) and follow the speaker's viewpoint only. This is an example of van Dijk's (2001) concept of positive/negative other-presentation (de)legitimation.

The use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' can be said to be meant to refer to the speakers themselves together with others who share similar opinions. According to Beard (2000), politicians use the pronoun 'we' to indicate their willingness and readiness to share responsibility with others, especially when decisions are unpopular, controversial, or doubtful.

The speakers in this study argued that this perception was for the common good of the people of the Rift Valley, including those being evicted from the Mau Forest. Therefore, the forest settlers were expected to accept the speaker's viewpoint as being true since he identifies himself with this group and what they stood for. Consequently, the people had to accept and follow the speaker's viewpoint because it was what the majority had decided. The speaker further claims that their rejection of the Mau Forest conservation programme was not in opposition to those advocating for the forest's restoration, but a collective position to defend the people's rights to occupy the forest areas.

The possessive pronoun 'our' indicates possession or ownership on a collective basis (Beard, 2000). It signals group ownership or possession; that is, it expresses a sense of collective or group identity and ownership. The people should, therefore, accept the speaker's perception and viewpoint because he is one of their own. Identifying himself as a member of the community casts the self in a positive light. That is, the speaker is among those who care for their well-being, hence the right person to look up to in the decision-making process (Wood, 1983; Goshgarian, 1998). This makes it easier for the speakers to persuade the hearers to accept the viewpoints they espouse and reject those of opposing

groups. In this context, the speakers portray themselves as concerned with the welfare of the settlers being evicted from the forest. The public should, therefore, trust them and accept their perception because they care about their well-being. This implies that those with divergent opinions should be rejected and resisted.

Another dichotomy of pronominal reference is displayed by the use of the pronouns 'us' and 'them', 'they' and 'their/theirs'. These pronouns are used to evoke a sense of otherness (van Dijk, 2001); that is, group-based relations by articulating opposite valuations of the self (inclusiveness) and the other (otherness). In other words, the 'they' are portrayed as being different and perhaps inferior in some way to the 'us'. The pronoun 'us' entails distancing oneself from the 'them' (Chilton, 2004; Beard, 2000). The 'them' do not share the people's beliefs, values and plight, hence ought not to be trusted in the process of decision-making in regard to forest conservation. Therefore, the audience should reject the perceptions, values and beliefs of the 'they/them' and follow the perceptions, values and beliefs of the 'I/we/us'.

The speakers' use of the pronouns 'you/they' serves to portray the 'you/they' as a group which is different in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes (Chilton, 2004; Beard, 2000). The 'you' represents a group of individuals who do not share the speakers' view that the Mau Forest conservation issue was oppressive and unnecessary. As a result, the speakers argue that the public had to reject this group's perception because it was ostensibly inhuman. The speakers further urged the public to ignore this group and their stance because it was contradictory to the speakers' and their followers. Therefore, the pronoun 'you' is used to represent a group of people that is allegedly out to use the Mau Forest conservation programmes to subject the settlers to unnecessary suffering. As a result, the speaker urges the public not to accept this group's propositions.

The use of the pronoun 'you' also serves to present the 'you' as a group of people who lack facts about the Mau Forest, hence the one supposedly cheating the Mau Forest settlers into moving out of the forest. The speaker argues that the 'you' are an ignorant group that cannot be trusted to guide the people on forest conservation; hence, the people should ignore them. It is important to point out that the political leaders use the pronoun 'you' to portray their political opponents negatively, probably as a delegitimation or othering strategy (van Dijk, 1998) meant to dissuade the public from buying the idea that forest conservation is necessary to avoid ecological disasters in Kenya.

Though the speakers might have been aware that forest conservation was necessary, they still insisted that forest degradation was not related to the adverse weather experienced in Kenya. The aforesaid speakers must have done this so as to safeguard their political relevance both at the local and national political scene (Towett, 2004). This assertion agrees with Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) view that political leaders use language to mislead and distort reality so as to achieve their selfish predetermined ends. Further still, van Dijk's (1998) position that politicians use language to attack the rationality of their opponents' arguments, so as to dissuade the public from accepting such arguments, concurs with these sentiments.

2. Literature review

The personal pronouns political leaders choose to use in their utterances serve a greater function besides replacing the proper names of individuals or groups. Such pronouns can be used as markers of ideologies underlying speakers' utterances. Ideologies are regarded as world views or everyday beliefs that constitute organised complexes of representation and attitude with regard to certain aspects of the social world (van Dijk, 2001). Ideologies not only control what one says, but also how it is said. Ideologies form the foundation of discourse and are hidden rather than overtly stated. Spoken discourses are among the processes by which dominant ideologies are produced. Studying pronominal references in political discourse is important since the pronouns serve to convey speakers' ideologies and attitudes. Some of the ideologies include inclusiveness and exclusion. Pronominal reference is, therefore, an important language feature that needs to be studied, especially in political discourse. This is because pronouns can be used to fulfil delegitimising strategic functions, granting authority to the speaker, and promoting self-representation (van Dijk, 1998, 2001) and expressing speakers' identity, solidarity with the addressed or distancing oneself from others (othering functions). The public need to be enlightened on this so that they can make better judgments in relation to what political leaders say and how they say it.

Politics is concerned with power, that is, the power to make decisions and to control resources, other people's behaviours, and their values. Politicians have achieved success in controlling people's behaviours and beliefs, through their skilful use of rhetoric, with the aim of persuading the people to accept their views (Jones & Peccei, 2004). Power is defined in terms of control (van Dijk, 2001); that is, groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of other groups. This ability presupposes a power base of privileged access to social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, or various forms of public discourse and communication (van Dijk, 1998).

Power may be enacted in the myriad of taken-for-granted actions of everyday life. Therefore, if we are able to influence people's minds (their knowledge) or opinions, we may indirectly control their actions and decisions (van Dijk, 1998). So, power of the elite members of society, such as political leaders, enables them to control others in terms of their opinions, attitudes, decisions, and actions. Power is also indicated by who controls what is said, when and where (van Dijk, 1998). The lexical choices elite members of society such as political leaders make may influence what people see as most important, hence may influence representation (Wodak, 2009).

Controlling people's minds is a form of reproduction of power and hegemony (van Dijk, 1998). Recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions inconsistent with their beliefs and experiences through discourses from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources (Wodak, 2009). As such, the recipients may not have the knowledge and belief needed to challenge the discourses or information they are exposed to.

Pronominal reference can be used as markers of identity and othering. Identity entails the speakers linguistically defining who they are, whereas othering indicates labelling those who have opposing characteristics as different or inferior (van Dijk, 1998). The first-person personal pronoun 'I' refers to the speaker and serves to indicate the speaker's personal involvement and being useful, especially when decisions which are controversial, unpopular or doubtful are being made (Beard, 2000). The speaker thus presents himself/herself as self-important and above other colleagues on the understanding that he/she is the one with the correct information to guide the people in decision making (Beard, 2000). That is, the people should rely on the speaker for direction and advice in the decision-making process. As a result, the speaker is portrayed as the authority in the decision-making process, hence exhibiting power and control over the people. The people should therefore accept and follow the speaker's viewpoint about the issue under discussion. The group that the speaker belongs to is perceived to have common beliefs, activities, norms, and aspirations, which are in contrast to the opposing group (others). Speakers, therefore, use words which portray common beliefs, activities, norms, expectations, aspirations and even relationships with others (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Politicians use pronouns reference to identify with their audience so as to win their support or lead them down specific discourse paths (Mercer, 2000).

3. Methodology

The speeches by political leaders and senior government officials on the Mau Forest conservation debate formed the population of the study. These included speeches made by political party leaders, president(s), presidential candidates, cabinet secretaries and members of parliament during the Mau Forest restoration debate.

Downsampling procedures were used to select samples of political utterances made during the Mau Forest restoration debate. In this context, 50 speeches were selected from articles in the different electioneering periods, parliamentary debates, and government press briefings ranging from 2002 to 2022. Only speeches based on the Mau Forest conservation programme were selected for the study. These speeches were recorded and are publicly available in the national archives as well as different media platforms such as YouTube. These speeches were analysed in line with the critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory so as to reveal the implications of pronominal reference for the forest conservation debate in Kenya.

4. Discussion

The personal pronoun 'I' was used by the political leaders to serve different functions. One of the main functions was to express the political leaders' power and authority. This is illustrated below.

Example 1

I don't know whether these days Mau stretches all the way to Nairobi!

Ndakaini Dam is drying up.

*Do you want to tell **me** Mau Forest is the source of the water in Ndakaini Dam?*

I think it is unfair to say it is because of Mau.

Example 1 shows how the speaker used the personal pronoun 'I' to indicate the speaker's authority/power in regard to the Mau Forest conservation issue. In serving this function, this pronoun indicates the speaker's personal involvement, especially being useful when important decisions are being made. That is, the speaker viewed himself as the authority to lead and guide the people on decision making, especially in regard to the Mau Forest conservation issue. This implies that the speakers' perception and definition (*I think it is unfair to say it is because of Mau*) of the Mau Forest conservation issue was to guide the public on the position they could take as far as the Mau Forest conservation programme was concerned. This is because the speaker's viewpoint is allegedly a product of a well-thought-out process, hence reliable.

The use of the personal pronoun 'I' together with the negative verb 'don't' indicates the speakers' perception of the Mau Forest conservation issue as a falsehood being propagated by those with divergent opinions (others) who want to punish the people of Rift Valley and humiliate their political leaders (*I don't know whether these days Mau stretches all the way to Nairobi!*). The speakers seemingly doubt and question the sincerity of those claiming that the Mau Forest is responsible for the drought in the country. The speakers, therefore, offer their personal opinion that the Mau Forest issue is only being used as an excuse by the political opponents (others) to subject the people of Rift Valley to unnecessary suffering. Thus, the opinion offered by the speaker's opponents is portrayed negatively, hence undesirable. The speaker seems to persuade the hearers to reject and oppose the opponents' viewpoint.

The personal singular pronoun is also used to indicate a personal level. That is, the pronoun reflects the speaker's personal involvement and commitment, as illustrated below.

Example 2

I have retired but that doesn't mean that I shut up.

An outsider or even leaders from outside come to dictate what people of Rift Valley should do – are there no men and leaders in Rift Valley I will see how far they will go.

I did what I did to protect forests.

Example 2 indicates the speakers' personal involvement and commitment to the decision-making process. The speakers portray themselves positively. The speakers express their intention to personally ensure that their people are protected against eviction from the Mau Forest. The speakers, hence, portray themselves as trustworthy; that is, individuals whom the public should rely on because they have volunteered to guide and direct them on the

Mau Forest conservation issue. The findings above agree with van Dijk (1998) and Chilton (2004) on legitimisation; that is, speakers use pronoun reference for positive self-presentation. The public is therefore likely to accept and follow the speakers' viewpoint and reject divergent viewpoints on the forest conservation issue. This implies that the speaker is in a better position to guide the people on the forest conservation issue as compared to the outsiders (others). The people should therefore trust what he tells them in regard to the forest conservation issue because he is the one who has the facts. These findings agree with Beard (2000) that the personal pronouns indicate that the speaker views himself as self-important, placing himself above the collective responsibility of other colleagues. Consequently, the speaker should be trusted to inform, direct, guide or lead the audience in the process of decision-making about the Mau Forest issue.

The samples above have indicated that the speakers view themselves as the right people to guide the public on the stance they should take in regard to the forest conservation issue. According to the speakers, Mau Forest destruction is not related to the drought being experienced in the country. Consequently, the public should ignore and resist those advocating for the eviction of people from the Mau Forest. The speakers' claims above are illustrative of how the political leaders manipulate language so as to persuade their hearers to accept the viewpoints they espouse about forest conservation (and reject the views of the others). It is important to note that the speakers avoid mentioning the fact that forest destruction is the leading cause of drought. The politicians, therefore, use language to distort the truth about forest conservation so as to win the support of the masses towards the viewpoints they espouse about Mau Forest conservation.

The use of the personal pronoun 'I' in combination with the semantic category of mental verbs such as 'think' and 'know' suggests that the speaker is rational or reasonable (Beard, 2000). That is, the viewpoint that the speaker advances in regard to the Mau Forest conservation issue is well thought-out, hence reliable. This is contrasted with the views of the 'others' that are not well thought-out, hence unreliable and unacceptable. The following examples illustrate this.

Example 3

I don't know whether these days Mau stretches all the way to Nairobi!

Ndakaini Dam is drying up.

Do you want to tell me Mau Forest is the source of the water in Ndakaini Dam?

I think it is unfair to say it is because of Mau.

There have been insinuations that other settlers in other areas – Mount Kenya –

And I don't know which other forests – were removed without being compensated –

I want to ask Wangari Maathai and the other people who are making the allegations to tell the truth.

Example 3 illustrates the view that the Mau Forest depletion is not the cause of drought is a product of a well-thought-out process, based on facts. This implies that the speaker's

opinion is correct and well informed as contrasted with the opponents' viewpoint. The public should therefore accept it. The speaker feels that the Mau Forest is not the cause of the drought in different parts of the country. Consequently, those telling the people to move out of the forest are not being sincere. The people should therefore ignore them and follow the speaker's viewpoint that the Mau Forest is being used as an excuse to harass the people of the Rift valley and their leaders.

Apart from 'I', speakers also used the personal pronoun 'we'. The personal plural pronoun 'we' was used by speakers to refer to themselves together with others who shared similar opinions on the Mau Forest conservation issue. The following is illustrative of how speakers used this pronoun.

Example 4

***We** acknowledge the importance of having favourable environment ...*

***We** should bear in mind that we are dealing with human beings.*

***We** are not opposing anyone ...*

***We** agreed those in the Mau Forest be compensated ...*

***We** do not deny it, charcoal burning and felling of trees is going on.*

***We** don't want to hear people making senseless roadside remarks about it.*

***We** warn our members of parliament not to betray our people.*

Example 4 indicates how different speakers used the personal plural pronoun 'we'. Speakers used the pronoun to indicate collective responsibility and solidarity. That is, it indicates the speaker's readiness and willingness to share responsibility with others of similar opinion, especially when decisions are unpopular, controversial, or doubtful. Example 4 indicates that the speakers are opposed to their opponents' call for the eviction of the people from the forest because they feel that this move is oppressive and unnecessary.

The speaker's use of the personal plural pronoun 'we' indicates that the Mau is a political and not a conservation issue and that this view is shared by many other leaders from the Rift Valley region. The speaker, therefore, says that this perception is for the common good of the people of Rift Valley, including those being evicted from the Mau Forest. The people should therefore accept the speaker's viewpoint as true since he identifies himself with this group and what they stand for.

Example 5

***We** don't conserve the environment –*

That is why we are experiencing unreliable rainfall all the time.

*But even as **we** do so – our conscience must be very clear.*

***We** should bear in mind that **we** are dealing with human beings – and not chicken.*

A child who slept on an empty stomach – naked – and in the cold –

Temperatures in Mau are at 12 degrees – at night – very cold!

Therefore, **we** have to help our people.

The plural personal pronoun ‘we’ above indicates that the speaker is articulating an opinion that is shared by many others. According to the speaker, forest conservation is inhuman and should be resisted (*We should bear in mind that we are dealing with human beings – and not chicken*). This is a viewpoint which is shared by the leaders of Rift Valley. The people should therefore accept the speaker’s perception and viewpoint because it is the majority’s stance and resist the contrary opinion propagated by their opponents (others).

Example 5 indicates that the speaker is not alone in rejecting the forest conservation programme which emphasises the eviction of people from the Mau Forest, thus the common stance of the political leaders of Rift Valley. Consequently, the people should accept and follow the speaker’s viewpoint because it is what the majority have agreed on.

The speaker claims that their rejection of the eviction programme is not in opposition to those advocating for the forest’s restoration but a collective position to defend the people’s rights to occupy the forest areas. This is illustrated in the following example.

Example 6

We are not opposing anyone – and if there is someone who is opposed to the protection of the Mau Forest, then that person must be insane.

We agreed that those in the Mau Forest should be resettled elsewhere –
And those with title deeds should be compensated before they leave to pave way for the planting of trees in the forest.

We do not deny it – charcoal burning and felling of trees is going on ...
But telling **us** that a deadline has been set for people to be evicted forcefully –
We will never let it happen.

The speaker portrays himself as among those who are willing to share responsibility with other leaders in defending the people’s rights; that is, not to be evicted from the Mau Forest. The reference to forceful evictions suggests that the Mau Forest conservation exercise is a violation of the people’s rights that is being propagated by the ‘others’. The speaker is, therefore, registering his willingness to share the responsibility of defending the people’s rights. The pronoun also indicates that the speaker is part of the team that negotiated with the others (the ‘they’) on protecting the people being evicted (*We agreed those in the forest be resettled elsewhere*). The people should therefore accept the speaker’s perceptions because he means well for the people, and reject the propositions of the ‘others’. This is using language to create solidarity with the public so as to influence behaviour and decision-making (Harré, Brockmeier, & Mühlhäusler, 1999).

Consequently, the people should accept the speaker’s viewpoint because it is shared by many others who share the speaker’s feelings, beliefs, and values. These values and beliefs are for the common good of the speaker’s community which is threatened with eviction. The speaker, therefore, urges the people to also accept the same values, beliefs, and

attitudes which he represents. This is a positive presentation which is meant to entice the people to accept the speaker's opinion and reject that of the opponents (van Dijk, 1998).

Speakers also used the pronoun 'our'. This pronoun indicates possession or ownership on a collective basis. It signals group ownership or possession; that is, it expresses a sense of collective or group identity and ownership. The following example illustrates speakers' use of this pronoun.

Example 7

*The Mau issue is very sensitive – and it is of great importance to **our** people.
And we don't want to hear people making senseless roadside remarks about it.
But even as we do so – **our** conscience must be very clear.
We should bear in mind that we are dealing with human beings – and not chicken.
A child who slept on an empty stomach – naked – and in the cold –
Temperatures in Mau are at 12 degrees – at night – very cold!
Therefore, we have to help **our** people.*

Example 7 indicates the speaker's sense of identity. The speaker portrays himself as a champion of the people's rights to occupy the forest areas. The speaker views the Mau Forest conservation programme as inhuman (*We should bear in mind that we are dealing with human beings – and not chicken*) and urges the people to reject it. He identifies himself with the people threatened by eviction (*The Mau issue is very sensitive – and it is of great importance to our people*). The people should therefore accept his perception and viewpoint of the Mau Forest issue because he is one of their own. Identifying himself as a member of the community casts him in a positive light.

This pronoun ('our') also indicates that the speaker has the people's interests at heart (*Therefore, we have to help our people*). Consequently, the people should trust him and look up to him in the decision-making process and reject the divergent opinion being propagated by the 'others'. These findings agree with Wood (1983) and Goshgarian (1998) that political leaders use language to make their hearers feel good and cared for. This makes it easier for the speakers to persuade the hearers to accept the viewpoints they espouse and reject or resist those of their opponents, hence be able to influence the people's attitude towards the forest conservation issue.

Example 7 generally indicates the speaker's willingness to defend the people's rights. The pronoun also indicates that the speaker shares the plight facing the people. The speaker portrays himself as concerned about the welfare of the people being evicted from the forest. The people should therefore trust him and accept his perception because he cares about their plight. This implies that forest conservation as prioritised by the 'others' is punitive to the speaker's community, hence should be resisted. The speaker also feels that the people should be left alone to continue with their activities in the forest. Thus, the speaker endeavours to persuade the people to accept the speaker's values, beliefs and attitudes towards the forest restoration and reject those of the 'others'.

In summary, the plural forms in the samples above indicate speakers' sense of solidarity and identity with the audience. The use of 'we/us/our' indicates that the speaker is part and parcel of the audience. That is, the speaker shares the plight, values, and beliefs of the audience. This pronominal choice can influence people's perceptions about the topic of discussion.

Another dichotomy of pronominal reference is displayed by the use of the pronouns 'us' and 'them', 'they', 'their/theirs'. These pronouns evoke a sense of otherness; that is, group-based relations by articulating opposite valuations of the self (in-group) and the other (out-group). The 'they' are portrayed as different and perhaps inferior in some way to 'us'. The pronoun entails distancing oneself from the 'them' (Chilton, 2004; Beard, 2000). The 'them' do not share the people's beliefs, values and plight and hence should not be trusted in the process of decision-making. Therefore, the audience should reject the perceptions, values and beliefs of the 'they' and follow the perceptions, values and beliefs of the 'I'/'we'/'us'. The following examples illustrate this.

Example 8

You want to tell me that Mau is the source of water in Ndakaini Dam?

How do **you** tell a citizen ... that document ... is piece of paper ...?

You push people in the name of water catchment area ...

You push people ... are people rats and cats?

You oppress people ...

You shout eviction! Eviction!

You keep on running up and down.

Example 8 indicates a sense of otherness. The speaker portrays the 'you/they' as a group which is different in terms of values, beliefs, and attitudes. The 'you' are presented contemptuously as a group of individuals who do not share the speaker's view that the Mau Forest conservation issue is oppressive and unnecessary. The people should therefore reject this group's perception because it is ostensibly inhuman (**You push people ... are people rats and cats?**). The speaker urges the people not to trust this group because the 'you' do not share the people's plight and hence do not mean well for them (**You push people in the name of water catchment area**). The speaker urges the people to ignore this group and their stance because it is contradictory (**You want to tell me that Mau is the source of water in Ndakaini Dam?**).

The following example further indicates the speakers' sentiments of distrust for the 'others' who are referred to as 'you'. The 'you' are perceived to be different from the speaker's group, hence should not be trusted.

Example 9

Do **you** want to tell me Mau Forest is the source of the water in Ndakaini Dam?

I think it is unfair to say it is because of Mau.

Because now Mau is responsible for everything.

Example 9 portrays the ‘you’ negatively so as to persuade the public not to adhere to their call for eviction. The ‘you’ are presented as people who lack the facts about the Mau Forest, hence are supposedly cheating the public into moving out of the forest (*Do you want to tell me Mau Forest is the source of the water in Ndakaini Dam?*). The speaker argues that the ‘you’ are an ignorant group that cannot be trusted to guide the people on the forest conservation issue; hence, the people should ignore them.

It is important to point out that the speakers use this pronoun to portray their political opponents negatively so as to dissuade the public from buying the idea that conservation is necessary to avoid ecological disasters in the country. Though the speakers must be aware that forest conservation is necessary, they still insist that forest degradation is not related to the adverse weather experienced in the country. The speakers must have done this in order to safeguard their political relevance both at the local and national political scene. This finding agrees with Goshgarian (1998) that political leaders use language to mislead and distort reality so as to achieve selfish predetermined ends. The findings also agree with van Dijk (1998) that politicians use language to attack the rationality of the others’ arguments in order to dissuade the public from accepting such arguments. The following example further illustrates this.

Example 10

*How do **you** tell a citizen – for example, those who were given title deeds in 2005 – in Olenguruone!*

The current president issued – I think 12,000 titles – in 2005 to citizens.

*How do **you** persuade a citizen especially those who were given title deeds by none other than the president himself ... that whatever document was given to him by the president himself is a piece of paper ...*

Example 10 portrays ‘you’ as a group that does not respect authority. The speaker also portrays the ‘you’ as a group that does not value the rights of the people to occupy land. The speaker shows that this group contemptuously refers to title deeds which the people hold as pieces of paper. The group, therefore, rubbishes the official and legal documents which the people were issued with by the president himself. The people should, therefore, reject this group’s perceptions and accept the speaker’s viewpoint. This is delegitimation (van Dijk, 1998). The speakers use the pronoun ‘you’ to cast those advocating for forest eviction in a bad light so as to dissuade their people from accepting the view that eviction is positive or necessary. This is othering.

The use of the pronoun ‘you’ in combination with forms such as ‘oppress’, ‘push’, ‘dictate’, and ‘shout’ portrays the ‘you’ in a negative light. The pronoun, therefore, indicates otherness. It serves to portray the group in a negative light so as to dissuade the public from accepting the viewpoints they espouse. These verbs carry negative connotations and are associated with activities which debase and infringe on the rights of the people. The use of these verbs together with the personal pronouns is therefore meant to appeal to the

people's emotions, hence reject those who support forest eviction.

The speakers portray those urging the people to move out of the forest negatively. This is most likely meant to convince the public that the 'they' are against the community's interests, hence the community's enemies who should be repulsed. Although these sentiments may not be true, the public will most likely accept the viewpoints of their political leaders, who have ostensibly identified themselves with the people occupying the forest areas. This finding agrees with Goshgarian (1998) that politicians use language to work up their hearers' emotions so as to make them form opinions favourable to the politicians' predetermined ends.

The examples above indicate brutality on the part of those (the 'you/they') advocating for the eviction of people from the Mau Forest. The 'you' are portrayed as insensitive to the plight of the people. The 'you' take advantage of the Mau Forest issue to oppress the people. The speaker argues that the Mau Forest conservation issue is used by this group as an excuse to oppress innocent citizens (*I think it is unfair to say it is because of Mau. Because now Mau is responsible for everything.*). The 'you' are hence portrayed as a group without a conscience. The speaker urges the people to reject this group's perception. The 'you' are also portrayed as a public nuisance. The use of forms such as 'shout' and 'run up and down' indicates speakers' negative attitudes towards this group. The speaker views them as a group out to disturb the peace of the people in the Mau Forest (*You keep on running up and down ... Shouting Mau! Mau ... you shout eviction! Eviction!*).

The examples above therefore indicate that the 'you' are allegedly interested in evicting the people from the Mau Forest. They do not care about their plight. Shouting and running up and down are used to cast the 'you' in a negative light, hence otherness. 'They' are portrayed as a group that does not care about the suffering the forest conservation issue will unleash on the people. The people should therefore reject this group and the values they stand for, and embrace those of the speaker. This is because the speaker's values, beliefs and attitudes are in the best interest of the ethnic community. These values and beliefs are centred on the people being left alone to occupy the forest. The speakers are thus out to win the people to their side regardless of the destruction their continued stay in the forest will cause. This is duping the people to continue harming the Mau ecosystem for political expediency. The words speakers choose to use, and the company they keep, make them bear either positive or negative connotation. Connotation serves to reveal feelings and attitudes (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It is these hidden attitudes which this study intended to reveal for the common good of all in the society.

The use of pronoun reference in combination with specific auxiliary and main verbs, as indicated above, can be interpreted to indicate the sense of inclusiveness and exclusion (otherness). These phrases, when used frequently over time in given contexts, can reveal the speakers' hidden attitudes. Consequently, the phrases and pronoun reference acquire an evaluative meaning, hence attitude and underlying ideologies. Therefore, these lexical associations can be said to be imbued with speakers' negative attitudes towards forest

conservation and the underlying ideologies of inclusiveness and otherness. The examples above show that the pronoun ‘I’ associates with lexical items which indicate speakers’ power and authority in making an informed evaluation of the conservation issue. The lexical associations portray the speaker as an authority and expresses doubts about others’ arguments in regard to the Mau Forest conservation issue. The people should therefore rely on the speaker’s opinion and assessment of the conservation issue and adhere to it while rejecting/opposing any other divergent viewpoint. The examples indicate that the speaker’s priority is protecting the people’s economic activities over forest conservation. The speakers’ aim is to use their ethnic and political affiliations to allegedly protect the people who have encroached on the Mau Forest.

The examples of plural forms such as ‘we’, ‘us’ or ‘our’ also indicate identity and solidarity. The speakers identify with the people being evicted from the Mau Forest and vow to help them fight off those in support of the forest conservation programme. These plural forms also indicate a sense of inclusiveness/solidarity and identity with the audience. The use of ‘we/us/our’ indicates that the speaker is part and parcel of the audience. That is, the speaker shares the plight of the people being evicted from the forest. This pronominal choice can influence people’s perceptions about the Mau Forest conservation issue.

Another dichotomy is displayed by the use of the pronouns ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘they’, ‘their’/‘theirs’. These pronouns evoke a sense of otherness; that is, group-based relations by articulating opposite valuations of the self (in-group) and the other (out-group). The ‘they’ are portrayed as different and perhaps inferior in some way to ‘us’. The pronoun entails distancing oneself from the ‘them’ (Chilton, 2004; Beard, 2000). The ‘them’ do not share the people’s beliefs, values and plight and hence should not be trusted in the process of decision-making. Therefore, the audience should reject the perceptions, values and beliefs of the ‘they’ and follow the perceptions, values and beliefs of the ‘I’/‘we’/‘us’.

5. Summary of the findings

- i. Personal pronouns are used to express speakers’ sense of inclusiveness/belonging/identity to in-group while distancing/othering those perceived to be against the speaker’s beliefs, opinions, or viewpoints.
- ii. The personal pronouns, when used in combination with the semantic category of mental verbs such as ‘think’ and ‘know’, serve to indicate that the speaker’s viewpoint is a product of a well-thought-out process, hence reliable. On the other hand, the use of personal pronouns in combination with the negative form ‘don’t’ indicates ridicule/contempt of the opponent’s viewpoint, hence otherness.
- iii. Language plays a critical role in uniting or dividing the public when critical or controversial issues are discussed. Linguists should therefore use their expertise with language to enlighten the public so as to enable them to make

informed decisions instead of relying on the political leaders in the decision-making process.

6. Conclusion

The personal pronouns political leaders chose to use in their utterances serve as markers of ideologies underlying the speakers' utterances. These ideologies are regarded as world views or everyday beliefs that constitute organised complexes of representation, and they not only control what one says, but also how it is said. The ideologies of inclusiveness and exclusion (otherness) formed the foundation of the Mau Forest discourse and served a great role in determining what the political leaders said about the forest conservation cause. Spoken discourses are among the processes by which dominant ideologies are produced. Therefore, studying pronominal reference in political discourse is important since the pronouns serve to convey speakers' ideologies and attitudes. Pronominal reference is, therefore, an important language feature of persuasion that needs to be studied, especially in political discourse.

This kind of language use can easily persuade the hearers to accept and adopt the political leaders' viewpoints of inclusiveness and otherness, thereby jeopardising the forest conservation cause. The use of personal pronouns indicates the political leaders' view that combating climate change is a choice that humanity has to make. That is, man can choose to either conserve the environment or deplete it for economic and political gain. The use of the personal pronouns in combination with the negative form 'don't' serves to indicate ridicule/contempt of the stance taken by those with divergent viewpoints. That is, those who view forest depletion as related to adverse climatic conditions are portrayed in a bad light, hence exclusion (otherness). However, there are no two options about it. It is either humans work together regardless of political, ethnic, economic, and philosophical differences to combat climate change, and we all survive; or we all perish like fools. Combating climate change requires the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, regardless of their political or ethnic affiliation. Linguists should, therefore, use their expertise with language to make plain the political leaders' motives of inclusiveness and exclusion manifest in their language use. This would, in turn, enable the public, government, and policymakers to make informed decisions and choices in regard to forest conservation for the common good of all.

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