

Linguistic Strategies According to Gender as Reflected in the Kenya National Assembly

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Abstract

Gender is ever present in our conversation. It is used to explain everything and is embedded in our institutions, our actions, thoughts and beliefs. In this research, we set out to establish the linguistic strategies employed by the male and female members of the Kenya National Assembly to drive their agenda and to achieve successful communication. This research sets out to establish assembly members' manner of speaking and general adherence to speaking norms on the assembly floor. Under such a background, the study examined language and gender in the Kenya National Assembly. The research questions were: what are the linguistic strategies employed by speakers on the assembly floor based on their gender? How do members react to the gendered linguistic strategies? The study employed the Politeness Theory. The data was collected from four randomly selected sessions in the 12th Parliament- also referred to as National Assembly. The analysis of data adopted a quantitative and qualitative approach. Audio-visual recordings from the National Assembly were transcribed for analysis. In this process, selective transcription was used for the purpose of the research. Analysis of the linguistic items was done. The study established that members of the National Assembly used the following linguistic strategies: being direct, being assertive, use of metaphors, were ironic among others. It was observed that most of the members reacted in the following ways: cooperation, showing understanding, among others.

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Keywords

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Introduction

This study sets out to establish language strategies that are employed according to gender in the Kenya National Assembly. Research has it that women’s speech differs from men’s speech in a number of ways. Women and men are known to use language differently with regards to style, register and the manner of using language during interaction (Shazu,, 2014). Further, Eckert & McDonnell-Ginet (2003) also established that culture has an influence over the nature in which gender impacts on linguistic choices and attitudes including politeness and stereotypes. They continue to argue that there is a close relationship between gender and language; and that gender is a social construct that has been brought about using language. Additionally, men’s and women’s style of speaking are deeply rooted in power structure (Eliasoph, 1987). However, in the parliamentary context, they do not necessarily always engage in power contests; the prime goal of linguistic choices and strategies is communication- to pass across their concerns and as such the Politeness Theory becomes significant for this study.

1. Research objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

- i. To identify and describe the linguistic strategies employed by speakers on the assembly floor based on their gender.
- ii. To discuss how members react to the gendered linguistic strategies.

2. Assembly speaking norms

The general rules and regulations which set out how debate takes place in the National Assembly are set out in its *Standing Orders*. Members are expected to address each other in the third person as “Honorable [surname]” and should not directly address each other as *you*. Despite the existence of such rules a few members still do not adhere to them and sometimes participants fail to address each other through the chair. When the rules of engagement in assembly debate are violated, it is not accidental; most times it is a strategy employed to get at another participant. The current study will consider this dimension in the analysis of linguistic strategies employed in the assembly with particular attention to gender and the manner in which interaction occurs with regard to politeness or otherwise. Standing Orders are applied in debate to ensure equality of speaking time to all individuals so that no single MP has monopoly of debate in the chamber. Only one speaker is authorized to speak and be heard at a time. This rule is often defied by political contestants especially to demonstrate or challenge for power and attention. There is, however, a formal function for a member to give way. During debate, some members will make use of notes, prepared scripts or some even without extemporizing. To some extent, speeches or contributions may be prepared since members are usually aware in advance of the topic of debate.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Parliamentary Debate: the Institutionalized Context

The language of parliamentary debate is described by Bayley (2004) as the most formal and institutionalized variety of political language. Bayley further notes that formal parliamentary talk can take place in the chamber, where talk can tend to be adversarial, or in committee, where it may

be more cooperative. The focus of this study is in the language used in the assembly debate chamber.

Wodak (2000:361) states that parliamentary debates are distinct forms of discourse because of their functions of ‘law making, legitimization and control.’ Debates in many countries’ assemblies are accessible to the public because they are televised: therefore members of the public have access to legislative procedures, policy making and political conflicts and controversies. This also is the case with the Kenya National Assembly where the public can access the debate chamber and also get both audio recordings and written transcripts from the Hansard which is the official written record of everything that is said in the chamber.

3.2 Gender: Social Constructionist View

In this study, *gender* in comparison to *sex* is viewed as something not biological but socially constructed and constitutive of identity. This study does not intend to view women as a homogeneous sociolinguistic block neither does it consider divisions of male and female speech styles. Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) emphasize that despite research moving from essentialised notions of gender, gender as a social category is still highly prevalent, essentialised and stereotypical gender categories still exist and are oriented in conversation.

Swann (2009:19) states that gender is no longer viewed as a ‘prior category that affects how people speak; rather, it is now more widely accepted that a person’s actions produce their gender (and therefore their identity).’ Butler (1990) sees gender as ‘repeated stylization’ of the body, but to many linguists it seemed that language using too offered a good example of ‘repeated stylization’.

Cameron (2005) observes that previous research had focused on how women and girls were silenced and dominated in public contexts, or denied access to languages, literacy and speech styles that were needed to enter public institutions on equal terms, or undervalued because of stereotypes and prejudices about their ways of speaking (and writing).

Inoue (2006), in a study from modern Japan reveals that there is a close bind between language, gender and the political economy by locating the origins of Japanese ‘women’s language’ in the process of nation building. Women’s language is thus never purely about gender, this is also cited by Barret (1995) in an analysis of a stereo-typed women’s language by American drag queens.

Georgieva (2014) states that men’s and women’s speaking styles are not monolithic. Gender is embedded in our actions, our beliefs and our attitudes that it looks so natural Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) assert that speakers are constantly doing “gender”. The different ways men and women speak results from the gender-marked social contexts in which they operate (e.g. bread-winner, child-nurturer, caretaker, manager, etc.).

In the National Assembly, gender is still a visual factor with the paucity of elected women MPs; however, party membership and political experience may also affect the dynamics of linguistic interaction. Since women constitute a minority in the assembly at having only about 10% elected- and nomination raising their representation to about 30%, this study has considered whether the minority status of women affects the dynamics of debate in the assembly.

3.3 Theorizing Gender in the Context of Public Debate

Literature on women engaging in public discourse argues that there are often contradictory expectations of how women can and should engage in public discourse. Holmes (2006) refers to the existence of a ‘double bind’ where women who conform to and adopt stereotypically “masculine” forms of speech are often viewed negatively for doing so. These constraints are also true for women in positions of power in corporate settings. Holmes (2005) also found out that women business leaders have to manage expectations on the ways in which they should behave in discourse.

Mills (2003) draws upon the notion of *habitus* and notes that since one has to be initiated to the discourse of debate in public life, especially in the domain of politics, people are not immune to the codes and rituals of their linguistic environment; thus if the situation is one in which masculine speech norms have been prevalent over a period of time, it is likely that women who work in such an environment will adopt these norms if they are to be seen as professional.

Walsh (2001) notes that the folk-linguistic supposition that more women in parliamentary debates would have a ‘civilizing’ effect on debates is a burden on women parliamentarians because apart from adopting ritualized norms in a CoP, they are moreover expected to “civilize male-gendered species.”

Shaw (2000) set out to investigate whether the influx of women MPs into the British Parliament following the landslide Labor victory of 1997 had changed the extremely adversarial style of debate that was institutionalized in the House of Commons. Like Walsh’s women priests, many women MPs experienced contradictory pressures (from themselves as well as others): on one hand to perform their jobs competently by the existing standards of the institution, but on the other hand to use their supposed difference from men to “civilize” what was widely seen as an aggressive and boorish style of debate.

One way the women MPs solved this contradiction was to punctiliously abide by the official rules of engagement in the House of Commons. They were as competent as their male peers in the highly competent and self-assertive style of speaking that is required for keeping the floor; but what they did not do, which many men did routinely, was to seek to gain additional advantage illegitimately by interrupting, heckling, filibustering or joking. Some MPs disapproved of this rule breaking as ‘puerile’ and hoped women’s presence in greater numbers would eventually make it less acceptable; others feared rule-breaking by a woman would attract more notice and more severe sanctions than the same behavior among men- thus undermining women’s professional credibility. Consequently, women’s contributions occupied only two thirds as much time in proportion to their numbers as men’s (ibid).

Mey (2009) states that while no specific communication style is demanded of men in the political arena, women do not have an appropriate style available. However, within research on language and gender, certain linguistic choices have been identified as masculine in style: being more assertive in one’s expression and exercising of power and being direct and confrontational with adversaries in the political debate. These traits are however not found among all male politicians in parliamentary debates. Such masculine stereotyped forms are increasingly rejected by women. Within the Labor Party in Britain, Harriet Harman has rejected what she terms as the “militaristic” and “macho” language of the laddish coterie who surround Blair, claiming that talk of “big guns”, “big hitters” and “big beasts” is not how women refer to one another (*The Guardian*, 1999).

Researchers have also attempted to define the traits characterizing a feminine style. Blankenship and Robin (1995), using a study of corpus of political discourse in the United States between 1990 and 1994 identified the following five traits that characterize women's language in parliamentary debate:

- They base political judgments on concrete, lived experience
- Valuing inclusivity and relational nature of being
- Conceptualizing the power of public office as “capacity to get things done” and empower others
- Approaching policy formulation holistically
- Moving women's issues to the forefront of public arena.

Puwar (1997), Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) and Walsh (2001) have noted that women find a confrontational style, ranging beyond parliamentary debate, to be alienating and inhibiting. Sedgemore (1995:54) indicated that in parliament, when differences are small, they must be magnified and when they do not exist at all, they must be fabricated. In many parliaments, interventions include: stamping, interjections, noise and all types of comments demonstrating support or disapproval of the speaker. Shaw (2000) illustrates that most legal and illegal interruptions are made by men. By not availing themselves for these interventions, women therefore limit their access to the floor and thus relinquish their power in the debates. However, cultural differences can be observed in how this confrontation is managed- this latter part also forms a key component of this study especially with the manner in which such issues are handled with regards to gender and politeness strategies used.

Women are reported to have attained socialization in less competitive areas, like politics in regional parliaments for instance in the autonomous governments in Spain and the UK because less power is wielded there. As a result of the association of power and masculinity, when women reach high positions, they may be regarded as deviant examples virilized women and such reportedly include Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher. The political arena is as such a highly gendered social space. This study will among other things seek to establish whether the above assertions.

Georgieva (2014) notes the following among differences in the speech styles of men and women:

- Women tend to use more standard forms than men
- Women tend to use rising intonation instatements not meant as questions which tend to be interpreted as markers of hesitancy and lack of confidence
- Women tend to shift their speech style to suit the situation
- Men tend to use more vernacular forms and swear words than women as an index of self confidence
- Men tend to raise more topics in a conversation and show preference for less polite communication strategies
- Men tend to interrupt their conversational partners more often, especially if they are women.

Eckert (2000) in investigating reasons for politeness among Mayan villagers considered three contexts: women to women, women to men and men to men. It was recorded that polite language was functional for women, saying that different levels of politeness functioned as strategies to deal with different levels of power. Politeness was chosen as a disarming strategy. Eliasoph (1985) notes that in expressing friendliness, women form their expressive bonds while getting things done.

Brown (1980:93) also said that women had to be polite because they lacked power. It was also noted that women are more sensitive to potential face threateningness and therefore modify their speech accordingly. Women who try to exhibit discursive power are usually judged unfavorably. Further, women have less power in men’s domain i.e. politics since they do not usually interrupt. Interruption equals power.

From these studies it is difficult or impossible to apply the common sense idea that the way people speak just expresses their inner essence of who they are, or the identity they acquired when they were young children. These therefore challenge the notion of a single prototype for masculinity or femininity by calling attention to the multiplicity of gender and sexual identities it is possible to perform. However, Cameron (2005) still emphasizes that English teachers value the symbolically ‘masculine’ ability to ‘take command’ in a group discussion, their professional ideology also gives them a strong commitment to symbolically ‘masculine’ values of collaboration and sensitive listening.

It upon such premises that language and gender will be studied. This study also seeks to consider some or all of the above features such as how women adopt to a male dominated domain of politics as practiced and lived in the Kenya National Assembly. It will further consider whether the assumption that women MPs can have a civilizing effect on the National Assembly debate especially when they are a minority in the traditionally male dominated assembly with regard to politeness or otherwise. Further, Baxter’s (2012) assertion that women in positions of leadership can use language as a *resource* rather than a role is relevant to the current study in terms of examining whether gender is invoked in language use in the National Assembly.

Holmes (2005) and Baxter (2012) discuss the ways in which gender interacts with power in corporate boardroom settings. Baxter’s aim was to identify evidence of “linguistic traces” of how gendered resources were used in a male dominated senior management boardroom. Baxter (2012) found out that women leaders used gendered resources to shift their style of speaking, and concluded that such shifts were ways of challenging and contesting hegemonic practices. Holmes (2005) found out that women in positions of power operated in ways similar to their male colleagues and would sometimes adopt a strategy that tested the boundaries of what was appropriately gendered behavior in their work place. These two studies emphasize the fact that despite greater equality of gender in these corporate settings, gender is still a factor that can direct interaction.

Walsh (2001) proposes that women participants in institutional contexts make use of different linguistic speech models and shift between these. Women use a number of possible strategies for traditionally male dominated fields and consider risks and advantages in terms of individual career interests of women and achieving gender equality. One of these includes a ‘performative model’ where a protagonist shifts between masculine and feminine styles of speaking. This therefore presupposes that gender can be deployed strategically (ibid).

Edelsky (1981) found out in a study that in a collaborative versus formal floor women were more comfortable talking precisely those times in which more than one person commanded the floor. Women spoke more frequently, joked more and spoke less hesitantly at times in which talk was more of a collaborative venture where two or more people either took part in a free-for-all or jointly built one idea, operating on the same wavelength. People acted as friends as well as colleagues then.

Trudgill (1983) notes that women are known to use more polite forms than men, this is in line with their need to be valued by the society; it is a way of protecting their face.

“The deficiencies in women’s language is not due to the fact that they were incapable of vital communication: rather men took up the upper hand in conversation, enacting social dimorphism (differences) in echo of physical (sexual) dimorphism. Thus power was seen as a central figure, where men pushed women to smaller and less significant spaces on the linguistic floor by several means: by interruptions and overlaps; by failing to take up women’s conversational gambits or by using derogatory remarks,” (Fishman 1983).

Sadiqi (2009) in a study conducted in Morocco considered the complex interaction between language, gender and power centers especially in religion and politics. She states that women are learning the power of language and that they, according to their differentiated resources, manipulate it to their advantage. By manipulating language, women’s issues become state issues. By manipulating the language resource, Moroccan women have confronted patriarchy- a challenge to the male dominated society. This aspect is also of concern to this study. Have the women MPs made women’s issues state issues and if so, how have they managed to do this?

Holmes (1992) states that there is no incentive for adult males to give up highly valued talking time in public contexts. Indeed, Walsh notes that increasing numbers of women in some institutions can serve to ‘strengthen fraternal networks’ among men. Yoder (1991) describes this as the ‘intrusiveness effect’ whereby highly masculinised occupations become more, not less, resistant to rapidly increasing numbers of women.

In this study, we also show whether women MPs use various strategies to challenge male authority and dominance in the assembly during debate or whether as Fishman (1983) says, they accept to be pushed to the linguistic floor- as the culture requires of ‘good’ women.

4. Theoretical framework

The study has been founded on the Politeness Theory. This theory was first advanced by Brown and Levinson (1978). In the theoretical part of their work, they introduce the notion ‘face’ in order to illustrate ‘politeness’ in a broad sense. The politeness theory is premised on the philosophy of Grice and Searle (1975) who introduced politeness through the four maxims of the cooperative principles in ‘logic and politeness.’ These four maxims are: *maxim of quantity*-information should be brief or long enough so that no part of the information is left out; *maxim of quality*- truthfulness and with evidence; *maxim of relevance*- one should always be relevant and *Maxim of manner*- always strive to be clear, orderly, avoid obscurity and ambiguity. The cooperative principle assumes that human interaction is generally cooperative in terms of showing polite manners. The signals of politeness can be observed by the interlocutors in conversation. The speech acts are therefore significant since each act is meaningful. Searle (1969) stresses the indirectness of speech act as ‘the chief motivation- though not the only motivation- for using these indirect forms of politeness.’

Brown and Levinson suggest four politeness strategies that can become the speaker’s choice as follows: positive politeness; negative politeness; by going off record and by not doing a face threatening act (FTA).

Positive politeness strategies involve the following:

- Notice, attend to the hearer
- Exaggerate
- Intensify interest to speaker/ hearer
- Use in-group identity marker
- Seek agreement
- Assert common ground
- Joke
- Assert or presuppose speaker’s knowledge and show concern for him/ her
- Offer, promise
- Be optimistic
- Include speaker/ hearer in the activity
- Give (ask for) reasons
- Reciprocate
 - Give gifts (be sympathetic, cooperative and be understanding) Negative politeness is used when a person wants to have his freedom of action unobstructed and his/ her attention unrestricted. It is usually aimed at the addressee. Such strategies include some of the following
- Use of metaphors
- Apologizing
- Being direct
- Impersonalizing speaker/ hearer
- Use of metaphors
- Use of rhetorical questions
- Vagueness
- Being ambiguous
- Making presuppositions The fourth strategy which is called *opting out* refers to when the person decides not to do any of the face threatening acts. The benefit of this is that the person does not become engaged in any possible interaction. The speaker would therefore be unlikely to get any effect at all. However, not all interaction strives for politeness. Brown and Levinson’s theory assumes that the end goal as cooperation of participants in dialogue, but in the context of the assembly chamber, interaction is not necessarily cooperative, and FTAs are almost actively encouraged (Bayley 2004: Harris 2001). Bargiel-Chiappini (2006) argues that emotions, when accounted for, are also a means of face protection. Therefore in analyzing the audio recordings of the National Assembly the above cited features will be considered in light of the manner in which gender differences in language come out with regard to politeness or impoliteness as strategies of communication.

• 5. Methodology

This study randomly identified four sessions from the 12th parliament of the Kenya National Assembly as recorded and uploaded on You-tube by the communications department in the National Assembly. The researcher purposefully identified those periods when the National Assembly is busy especially during the period discussing the proposed changes to the election law and when there are important bills to be discussed. This is because the source of data is adequate to study the phenomena in question; this, Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1997) refer to as “Time sampling.” In order to narrow down the corpus to allow for a systematic and organized manner, the linguistic exchanges and interactions between MPs were broken down into smaller units of analysis. In this study, only linguistic exchanges and interactions between MPs that directly refer to or allude to gender were considered for analysis. The video recordings were played and replayed until common themes and ideas became apparent. The data is presented qualitatively. All members of the National Assembly

therefore are potential subjects of study without any biases or discrimination. The findings have been presented in a thematic manner.

6. Findings

The findings from the data analyzed are presented and discussed below.

6.1 Cooperation

During debate on the President's address to parliament, a session that was chaired by a female MP. It was observed that the Chair spoke to members reassuringly- in a very friendly tone and did not put off any member who took to the floor during debate even when such a member's time was up. The Chair frequently thanked and appreciated MPs and even cited their achievements outside Parliament. Male MPs frequently referred to the chair in their speech. This was done in a respectable manner:

"Thank you Madam Chair...."

Also, male MPs frequently interrupted when another member took to the floor.

In a session that debated the NHIF and Trustees Bill, MPs- both male and female- were generally cooperative. The *maxim of quantity* was observed throughout. The *maxim of manner*- speaking with clarity so that the matter was exhaustively explained was also noted. All speakers were also relevant. Turn taking was done well and respectfully. They observed decorum, generally agreed on most of the issues raised; perhaps this was because the Bill touches on all Kenyan workers' interests. The Minority leader, in appreciating cooperation from a member of the opposing side became informal and showed exaggerated friendliness. This is what the latter said:

"...this favors the youth and persons with disabilities and I am sure Sankok will be happy with this."

6.2 Friendliness

With regards to the above, it should be noted that Hon. Sankok is an MP living with disability. By referring to Hon. Sankok simply as "Sankok", the member is seeking to be friendly despite not conforming to the Standing Orders that require a formal reference to another member of the house. This does not elicit any sanctions from the Speaker of the session.

6.3 Directness

The female Chair was however authoritative and fair in distribution of speaking time to members. At one time the Chair firmly reminded a member:

"Honorable Ichungwa, do not guide me. You cannot guide me."

She also frequently repeated herself for emphasis and guidance.

The effect of this strategy is that it gives her power and as such members are forced to conform in order for the house to continue transacting its business in an orderly manner.

6.4 Negative politeness/ damaging face

When a male was on the chair, was speaker or acted as such, there was a sharp deviation from the instance when a female was in charge. The chair was cooperative but at times showed negative politeness and even chastised the MPs as in the cases shown below:

Is that member walking or standing still?

It is good to behave as if you know where you have entered...when walking in here you know you are in a hallowed place.

The male chair or Speaker was also observed to offer appropriate guidance to the MPs whenever they seemed to stray from the objectives set out.

Through such a strategy, the speaker damages the face of the members so referred to and as such, they avoid the public eye; they are in essence embarrassed and do not make any attempts to be seen or heard of.

6.5 Use of loaded/ emotive words

Male MPs spoke authoritatively and used modals such as *must*, *important*, *ensure*, etc.; they also used emotive words such as *treason*, *brutality*, etc. The male MPs sounded knowledgeable and used to speaking in floor of the house. Most speakers were male.

In a discussion on insecurity, both male and female MPs took to the floor, they were articulate, emotive and sometimes chided each other. A few exchanges are provided below:

Hon. Rasso (Male): Those who are killers have no shame. They have no morals. I want to warn the Jubilee government...Marsabit is not Ukur Yataani...Ukur Yataani is not Marsabit.

Hon Jaldessa (Female): I want to differ with Honorable Rasso. The report is shallow, vague. The report is very biased....

Hon. Sankok (Male): From rumors...cabinet has not met for the last 8 months. Now only God can protect Kenya...Honorable Matiangi was lying. He must apologize...he is lying in the streets. How can I be quiet..and our president who I am loyal to is mute on this one?

In a heated talk on insecurity in Samburu, Honorable Korere Sarah, a female MP, said the following:

“I wondered why the member for Samburu spoke about Laikipia...the lie we are peddling here about Laikipia...leaders from Baringo, Pokot and Samburu are speaking as if they...those are reckless and useless statements from a leader. It’s quite a shame that there’s local intelligence but they cannot gather any intelligence.”

Hon. Kutuny (Male): If the CS cannot hold people accountable, then Matiangi himself must be held accountable.

Hon. Korere (Female): The cabinet has abdicated and the president has abdicated...

Hon. Lekuntare (Male):I don’t think the Honorable member has interests in Laikipia. I will invite him to Laikipia. (referring to Hon. Rasso)

The use of such loaded words causes concerns to the members being referred to. Some of them lose their tempers and the Speaker has to intervene. Upon being given speaking time on the floor, such members seek to redeem themselves by countering claims leveled against them while others choose not to respond- especially when it is a female member who has made such claims.

6.6 Thematic concerns

The male MPs themes dwelled on the following: elections, state brutality, GDP, public debt, autonomy of institutions, etc. on the other hand, the female MPs topics were found to include the following: peace and fairness, COVID-19, health, women’s reproductive rights, education and agriculture. The women were also found to be speaking in a more or less pleading manner and frequently used words such as *please*.

The effect of such thematic concerns- especially those that touch on the family elicit prolonged reactions from members as they seek to clarify, support or condemn the matters at hand. The female MPs adopted stance with regard to their intonation and attitude draws the support of their male counterparts since they in essence are seeking support on the matters presented before the house.

6.7 Use of unparliamentary language

Apart from frequent interruptions, male MPs were found to exaggerate. For instance, one referred to another as "...a very good member." Male MPs frequently challenged authority, made demeaning comparisons and used other derogatory terms. For instance the former Majority Leader in Parliament referred to a member disrespectfully saying:

"...Mulembe, you cannot scare me...."

During this session, some male MPs were not only threatening but also abusive to their counterparts in the house. Honorable Duale told a male MP:

"You can do me nothing...this is Bunge!"

This is a direct attack on another member and is not expected in Parliament as a Community of Practice as this goes against the rules of the house.

The use of a confrontational stance is both downplayed and countered in an equal manner. The former approach is used in order to bring about reason and portray the concerned members as responsible and ready for settlement; the latter stance is used to show toughness and refusal to be intimidated. However, the Speaker reverts to the *Standing Orders* to bring about reason in the discussion.

6.8 Occupation of the floor

Male MPs who took to the floor in most cases spoke beyond the allocated time and had their microphones switched off. Female MPs on the other hand spoke within the time allocated to them. For instance a first time female MP for Marsabit only read from the written script she had made and in less than two minutes she was through.

Whenever there were interruptions from other MPs seeking the Speaker's attention on a point of order or instances of heckling and cat-calls, male MPs who were on the floor of the house, notably the Minority Leader Honorable Mbadi stood his ground. This was also the case with Honorable Muturi Kigano, Honorable Kimunya and Honorable Kajwan'g. Male MPs like Honorable Sankok were reported to "consult loudly." This is against house norms.

Honorable Wamuchomba, a female MP, also stood defiantly and dared male MPs. She also directly referred to another MP- a practice that goes against house rules. Honourable Millie Odhiambo is also on record for standing her ground, however, she did not deliberately break house rules.

The length that a member uses on the floor has the effect of portraying that member as tough or weak. Members who used the time allocated to the maximum were seen as knowledgeable, experienced and able to navigate the "dangers" of an otherwise hostile house. Those members who had to be stopped frequently for guidance by the Speaker did not have the freedom to fully articulate their concerns and seemed "lost".

6.9 Assertiveness

Honorable Millie Odhiambo, an experienced female MP in her third term in the house exuded confidence, spoke with authority and challenged her male counterparts on several occasions; she also frequently rose on points of order- thereby interrupting the current speaker. This was not the case with most other female MPs. She also spoke in defense of a female non-member of the house- the Honorable Martha Koome, the Chief Justice when the latter was accused of meddling in IEBC affairs despite the former not being a member of the house.

Such a stance clearly gives the member "freedom to express herself" because no member wanted to be seen to be in conflict. Further, the said member had the time to exploit language resources at her disposal as she pleased.

6.10 Impoliteness

Male MPs sounded impolite: one was ironic in discussing the Pandora papers about money stashed abroad yet the leadership still went to the World Bank with begging bowls. Honorable Kosittany, a male MP said:

“...there was zero mention on maize farming by the President.”

In a session to discuss new election rules set out by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), both male and female MPs who spoke exhibited negative politeness. This is what a female MP said:

“We do not bring them to the House. They were faulty...there’s no way we could have revived them...the IEBC should have conformed, should have published...the life of a parliament dies with that parliament. It was done outside the law. IEBC should have done those things and done them right...they were fatally damaged.”

Impoliteness had the effect of drawing more impoliteness from other members. This is because at such moments, the members being referred to did not want to look intimidated. Some engaged in sarcasm as a response when they were given the floor by the Speaker.

6.11 Use of metaphors

A male MP, Hon. Duale said:

“The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) decided to take this matter very casually. They put the cart before the horse...it will fall flat on the face of the law. Where was IEBC since 2017? Why did they have to wait for the 11th hour?”

A metaphor is used here to show that things were wrong from the start and therefore unacceptable. The image, ‘fall flat in the face of the law’ reinforces the negativity. Rhetorical questions are also used. Hon. Duale proceeds:

“...it is illegal, unprocedural, has serious embarrassing drafting errors on the part of the IEBC...we must reject the draft campaign regulations published. How can we debate issues dated 2016 in 2021?”

Hon. Junet Mohamed, a male MP, said the following:

“This House died a long time ago. It boils down to the competence of the IEBC in bringing documents full of irregularities and illegalities. They came here with a battery of lawyers. If the IEBC cannot get it right on small issues, I don’t know how they will get it right on bigger issues...they are preparing Kenyans for chaos and anarchy.”

It is worth noting that the negative impoliteness exhibited by both male and female MPs in the above cases is towards an entity- the IEBC, not toward a fellow member.

MPs also sought to be seen as cooperative with regards to the above discussion on the IEBC. This is what the Majority Leader Hon. Kimunya a male MP said:

“The House has done its job...IEBC had their time, they sat on it. This House has done its job. I sympathize with the IEBC...they have to bear the consequences. We are flogging a dead horse.”

The use of metaphorical language by the initial speakers in the discussion about the IEBC draw more metaphors from the members who spoke afterwards. The effect of this was to portray the IEBC as inhuman, unfeeling, not deserving sympathy. As such, the institution was condemned wholesomely.

6.12 Accusations

The male MPs accused the regime of a plethora of vices such as: disregard for court orders, the KEMSA heist (in their own words), corruption, etc. their reference to the “Handshake” and “election losers” was also satirical. Female MPs did not seem to adopt such an attitude. Many male MPs seemed to appreciate but oppose; female MPs tended to agree and support.

The use of such a strategy had the effect of portraying the concerned persons and agencies in negative light. As a consequence, the persons and bodies being referred to had no members rising to speak on their behalf as no member wanted to be seen to be working in cahoots with them.

6.13 Heckling and grandstanding

Heckling and grandstanding have no linguistic value; they have a functional value. During a session to consider the President's reservations on the Finance bill, both male and female MPs joined in opposing the government's position. There was a lot of heckling led by male MPs. Female MPs also joined in this hostile atmosphere despite the chair of the Committee being female. The chair was unable to control the agitated house- at one time she felt she was losing it and her voice trembled and she stammered despite her pleas.

This brought about disorder in the house and the Speaker had to intervene. In fact, the business of the house came to a standstill and the session(s) that had these either ended prematurely or had the Speaker leaving the Chair to another member with the hope of returning to an organized group.

6.14 Male hegemonistic tendencies

When normalcy returned after a disruption of house business due to a stand-off between the house leadership and its members, the female MPs were given special preference by the Speaker Honorable Justine Muturi who said:

"...there's a general concern that the female gender is always being sidelined."

He therefore took liberty to identify female MPs to speak to the issue at hand. This is in acknowledging that the female members are fewer than their male counterparts on a ratio of 2:1- a majority of whom are nominated to bridge the gender gap.

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6.15 Joking

There were also a few jokes –especially male to male MPs. for instance the Speaker asked Honorable Sankok, a member with disability, to

"...take good care of your legs."

This happened after another member "was seen" carrying away Hon. Sankok's walking aids.

In a discussion on family matters, Hon. Passaris, a female MP, was not only ironic but humorous when she said:

"I wish to say the following about men: they father children but blame the women for getting pregnant..."

In a quick rejoinder, Hon. Sankok, a male MP, said the following:

"...sometimes when we mislead the House...I think Honorable Passaris was misleading the House. When the woman was being sent the fare, why didn't she save it?"

Hon. Passaris': **"I would one day like to invite Honorable Sankok when we talk to widows and dispossessed women..."**

Hon. Passaris portrays herself as a "mother" and "caregiver" in this case- a gendered role culturally assigned to women.

The acting Speaker Hon. Cheboi, a male MP, responded in a light manner in the following way:

"Don't address Honorable Sankok..I think he's getting jittery when you talked about...what did you call it? Vasectomy, I think..." (a few members laughed.)

The above is gendered language. It alludes to men's role and duty in fatherhood. That men must take charge of their offspring and families.

The use of jokes had the effect of presenting such serious matters very lightly. Further, the members had the chance to raise serious matters without causing embarrassment to each other. The use of jokes is a face saving strategy.

6.16 Negative politeness

This was exhibited by the Speaker towards a female MP Hon. Dida Jaldesa. This had the effect of damaging the face of the female member of the house. This is illustrated below:

Hon. Jaldessa: Put the question Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: You cannot order the Speaker...you can only request the Speaker.

In an instance where a male MP, Honorable Rasso, interrupted Honorable Bunyasi, a fellow male MP, the latter expressed impoliteness by referring to a member in an unacceptable way as follows:

“Why did you do that in the middle of my statement?”

However, after the Speaker’s clarification, Hon. Bunyasi sought cooperation by telling the House Speaker:

“I am well guided Mr. Speaker.”

Such strategies adopted presented the members referred to as ignorant of house *Standing Orders* that are meant to guide members ‘ contributions every step of the way.

6.17 Sarcasm

Hon. Sankok, a male MP, is also on record for being sarcastic towards a fellow male MP Hon. Mbadi. This is what the former said about the latter:

“...you know he’s very intelligent, this Honourable Mbadi the Chairman of ODM”

In the above statement, Hon. Sankok in effect makes presuppositions about Hon. Mbadi as scheming. Further, the Hon. Sankok broke house rules by failing to use the in-group identity marker of his referent as Leader of the Minority in the House. The use of the in-group identity marker was however adhered to by several other MPs.

Honorable Omboko, a male MP, was also found to use extreme politeness and “defeatist” language by saying:

“...we are begging....”

As a rejoinder, Hon. Ichungwa, a male MP said the following:

“I really want to sympathize with the Honourable Omboko....”

This must be seen as a joke yet purporting to show sympathy: it actually makes certain presuppositions- albeit unsaid- about the member. The former is seen as expressing sarcasm towards the latter. It portrays the said member as weak. The member referred to never responds to this

6.18 Use of rhetorical questions and mixed strategies

In a petition to the House on the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) by Hon. Sossion, a male MP, there were several orderly exchanges between several interlocutors on the topic. However, the House Speaker used several repeated questions- which in retrospect should be seen as rhetorical as follows:

“Honorable Sossion, are you sure this issue is not before the court? Are you sure?”

In seeking cooperation with the speaker, the Majority leader Hon. Kimunya remarked:

“Indeed my worry is to do with the matter in court....”

Further, the Speaker said:

“I ask for your indulgence...Honorable Sossion, I want to suggest....”

All these are indicators of positive politeness towards the member.

On the same, the Speaker further said the following:

“Calling Public Officers may be an exercise in futility and could be a waste of public resources...I am not going to say anything on this matter because it is in court.”

This is negative politeness since it makes presuppositions about Hon. Sossion’s ignorance of house procedures and matters of industrial relations especially because Hon. Sossion is a reknown and seasoned trade unionist. The Speaker further says the following:

“...you all know that Honourable Sossion has been so passionate about this matter...your petition contravenes House rules...you are an industrious man Honorable Sossion, through your industry you can get the court documents on this matter.”

This latter part of the Speaker’s speech is not only sarcastic and casts aspersions but also makes presuppositions about the member. In discussing the above, the four male interlocutors were found to follow House rules, and were all generally very cooperative.

6.19 Questioning

During a session to discuss questions posed to various committees, a number of instances that exhibit positive and negative politeness were observed. On matters of security addressed to the Chair of the Security and National Defense Committee, Hon. Mutunga, a male MP asked:

“What steps have been taken? What measures have been taken to redress insecurity in Tigania?”

Such a linguistic strategy is meant to undermine the persons referred to since there is no response to any of the questions. It ends up portraying such persons as irresponsible who do not deserve sympathy and therefore stand condemned.

6.20 Making promises/ offering gifts

An instance of positive politeness is seen when the MP for Teso North Hon. Oku Kaunya asks:

“Could the chairperson explain to this House what efforts have been made to revive cotton farming? Could the chairperson tell this House the financial resources committed towards BT cotton farming?”

In response to the above questions in the manner in which they are presented, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee Hon. Wang, a female, issued a promise- a technique that shows positive politeness and appreciation. This is what she said:

“I think we will have a response in the next four weeks, Chair.”

Her response conforms to the *Maxims* of cooperation. It is also very precise. This helps to continue the harmony in the house.

6.21 Banging tables

Hon. Korere (female): (bangs the table in protest)

Hon. Korere banged the table in protest during debate on insecurity in her constituency. She felt that another member of the house was deliberately causing and perpetuating insecurity.

According to Ilie (2004), interrupting another speaker by heckling (or banging tables and such other noises) is a non- verbal strategy of disruption that plays more of a functional role than be a formal part of the exchange. Because this is done by a female member of the house, she draws sympathy and is seen as fighting for her people. She is seen as a determined mother and no member directly rises in opposition or confrontation against her.

During the discussion on insecurity, both male and female MPs from the affected areas spoke. They were found to exhibit negative politeness against their real or imagined enemies in the House. Sometimes they damaged the face of their “perceived opponents” in the house. The only different voice on this matter was Hon. Professor Jacqueline Oduol (Female) who addressed the issue devoid of emotion. She sought for cooperation and effectively observed the maxims of cooperation.

Conclusion

Male MPs did not directly demean their female counterparts. Some female MPs did not show appropriate respect to a female MP who happened to chair a session- a lack of solidarity. Male MPs

showed great respect for a female who was on the Chair. Male MPs tended to disrupt more, speak more, defy house rules and even showed contempt for others.

Most engagements were impersonalized- devoid of emotion, had human warmth, were objective and unbiased. Both male and female MPs were articulate, had knowledge of house rules and generally worked together. Themes addressed by female MPs were unlike those addressed by their male counterparts- although they had common ground on matters such as education and taxation. If female MPs are not deliberately and purposefully allocated time during debate, they may never get their voices heard since male MPs seem to have taken full control of house business especially because they are a minority. Only a few seasoned female politicians seem to have the habit of regularly taking to the floor in a tussle with their male counterparts. It is also further noted that despite a majority of women parliamentarians being nominated, they have simply not become “flower girls or *bonga* points” (Kivoi, 2014), some have been noted to adopt a “combative” posture (ibid) in the oversight role they are charged with. This is good for women joining the political field.

It can generally be concluded that the information about women and men parliamentarians in other countries and settings does apply to the Kenyan situation. There is need to conduct a more in-depth analysis on the linguistic strategies employed by parliamentarians with particular reference to their gender so as to obtain a more comprehensive description of the real situation.

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