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Perceptions in Uhuru-Raila 9th March, 2018 Handshake Discourse in Kenya's Print Media

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Abstract

In Kenya, the handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Orange Democratic Movement (henceforth referred to as ODM) leader, Raila Odinga, on 9th March, 2018 elicited diverse discourse on the phenomenon. The print media was replete with the discourse on the Uhuru-Raila handshake. This particular handshake ostensibly surpassed the traditional social purview of handshakes as polite greetings. Its conceptualization by Kenyans definitely eluded the precinct of handshakes as greeting occurrences hence the extensive discourse on it. The purpose of the paper was to evaluate the effect of the handshake on the perception of Kenyans by undertaking an analysis of the handshake discourse in Kenya's print media. The study was guided by Systemic Functional Grammar theory by Halliday (1975). The study adopted analytical research design and data was qualitatively analysed as per the tenets of the aforementioned theory. The study concluded that the Uhuru-Raila handshake had significant influence on the perception of Kenyans on socio-economic and political issues in the country.

Keywords: handshake, discourse, perception, systemic functional grammar.

INTRODUCTION

Kenya's 2017 general and presidential elections were held on 8th August, 2017 and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (henceforth referred to as IEBC) declared the final presidential results on 11th August, 2017 despite the transparency issues and the hacking claims raised by the National Super Alliance- a coalition of Wiper Party, Orange Democratic Movement and Amani National Congress (henceforth referred to as NASA) coalition on the IEBC system. The incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta was declared the winner with 54 percent of the total votes cast while Raila Odinga was runners up with 44.74 percent. Odinga and NASA filed a petition challenging the electoral process on 18th August, 2017. On 1st September, 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the presidential election, finding that the tabulation procedures failed to fulfil the constitutional requirement that all elections be "simple, secure, transparent and verifiable." It called for the elections to be held in "fresh" polls within 60 days (Carter Center Report (2018) on Kenya's general and presidential election).

The fresh election was slated for 26th October, 2017 but Odinga announced his withdrawal from the rerun of the presidential election on 10th October, 2017. He cited lack of real electoral reforms and a level playing field, and called for the boycott of the 26th October, 2017 polls. His supporters heeded his call and this only served to fracture the country further. Nevertheless, the election was held although legitimacy issues arose. The incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta was declared the winner with 98.27 percent of the votes cast and later inaugurated on 28th November, 2017 (Carter Center Report (2018) on Kenya's general and presidential election).

Despite the swearing in of the President, there was continued violent political confrontations that threatened key democratic actors including the courts, civil society, journalists and other. On the whole, the 2017 electoral process damaged Kenya's key

democratic institutions and its social cohesion, leaving the country deeply divided after an annulled presidential election, followed by a rerun election marred by violence and an opposition boycott (Carter Center Report (2018) on Kenya's general and presidential election). The general ramification of the process was a shattered social fabric in the country.

In the months since the election, there had been continued political confrontations. To change course, Kenya's political leaders needed to demonstrate the courage and foresight to prioritize actions that foster genuine dialogue and reconciliation and take concrete steps to advance Kenyans' collective interest in inclusive governance, foregoing narrow and short-term partisan interests (Carter Center Report (2018) on Kenya's general and presidential election). On 30th January, 2018 Odinga defied pressure from allies and foreign diplomats, and staged a mock inauguration at which he was declared "people's president". This show not only compounded the political crisis but also sowed discord within Odinga's own NASA (Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°136, 2018).

Slightly more than a month later, President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila Odinga, the antagonists in the presidential election, held a secret meeting at Harambee House on 9th March, 2018. The talks between the two leaders were thus an important turnaround in a situation that appeared headed toward prolonged stalemate (Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°136, 2018). The hallmark of this meeting was the handshake between the two. The handshake was a momentous phenomenon that elicited diverse discourse on the event in the Kenya's print media. The aim of this paper is to analyse the handshake discourse to evaluate the effect it has had on the perception of Kenyans. The paper confines itself to handshake discourse in the print media. Thus, for clear development of this paper the concept discourse and handshake are enshrined in the introduction.

The Concept Discourse

Schiffrin (1994) views discourse as a particular unit of language above the sentence and a particular focus on language use. The sentence is thus the unit of which discourse is formed. She further adds it is a systemic social and cultural organized way of speaking through which particular functions are realized. Social functions performed by discourse delineate the communicative role of discourse and the various fields of endeavours to which discourse belongs. Brown and Yule (1983) corroborate her view when they state that the analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use. Nuna (1993) adds that discourse is a complete meaningful unit conveying a complete message. The nature of this whole cannot be perceived by examining its constituent parts, 'there are structured relationships among the parts that result in something new' (Schiffrin, 2006). In this light, larger units such as paragraphs, conversations and interviews all seem to fall under the rubric of 'discourse' since they are linguistic performances complete in themselves (Adedun & Baidoo, 2014).

Yule (1985) asserts that attaining an interpretation of the messages we receive and making our own messages interpretable is not a matter of linguistic form and structure alone. Language users know more than that: they know 'discourse' rule. Discourse interpretation and construction can go beyond its linguistic boundaries to include the external world. A great deal of significance can be obtained from the analysis of the broader social situation in which language is used. This is referred to as context of situation by J. R. Firth (Léon, 2005) or the referential context (Nunan, 1993). This type of context also guides the structure of discourse (Van Els *et al*., 1984). Thus, determining the key features of the situation justifies some linguistic choices that are made by language users. Discourse analysis shifts the focus of linguistic analysis from a sentence-centred approach, and it takes it one step further to examine the interplay of language items and the way they merge with the external world to get their real communicative identity (Drid, 2010). It thus follows that the context of the handshake discourse is imperative.

The Handshake

The history of handshake dates back to 5th century B.C. in Greece. It was a symbol of peace showing that neither person was carrying a weapon. During the Roman era, the handshake was actually more of an arm grab. It involved grabbing other's forearms to check that neither man had a knife hidden up his sleeve (Andrews, 2016). In other words, the handshake was used to symbolize peace and security. Andrew (2016) further asserts that the shaking gesture of the handshake started in the Medieval Europe. Knights would shake the hand of the others in an attempt to shake loose any hidden weapons. Over time, handshaking evolved into polite greeting (Andrews, 2016).

Schiffrin (1978) developed an argument that handshakes serve the necessary and important social function of regulating and maintaining human interactions. She classified handshake gestures as "access rituals," or acts that request contact with the handshakee while simultaneously offering contact with the self. Handshakes as access rituals and gestures are therefore communicative in function. This interpersonal function also serves the larger social purpose of introducing and maintaining social relationships. Within this framework of handshakes as mutually-communicative gestures, Schiffrin (1978) claims there are three main handshake types: openings, closures, and collapse. Opening handshakes are purely future-oriented. They establish that some tact or shared access will occur after the handshake. Openings can be

greetings between friends and introductions between strangers. Closures indicate that the shakers have shared a period of heightened access and that it may be renewed at a future time. Collapse handshakes "collapse," or assemble the greeting, introduction and farewell events into one occasion. Schiffrin (1978) calls the political handshake "collapsed" because it encompasses introduction, greeting and farewell in a single act.

Schiffrin (1978) categorized the handshakes into openers, closures and collapses depending on the situational contexts. Nevertheless, handshakes can also be classified based on the manner in which the shaking is done by the participants involved. This result into the following types: limp/wimpy cold fish, the bone crusher, the gratitude handshake, the sympathy handshake, the pumper and the gripper. The limp/wimpy cold fish handshake indicates that one is non-committal, uninterested and often scared or lack thereof, in most things. They are mostly reserved people. The bone crusher handshake indicates that one is extremely cringe-worthy and seems to be testing the strength of the other. The individual might come across as intimidating. The gratitude handshake involves shaking hands on top of someone's, and is often used when a boss or a friend is perhaps trying to express their gratitude for a job well done. The pumper handshake is done like pumping water from a well or lifting weight at a gym. The gripper handshake occurs when the person shaking one's hand simply won't let go. This can be viewed and interpreted as invasion of privacy of one's personal space (Hall, 1959).

The handshake is near universal behaviour in western societies and sometimes constitutes social interaction (Hall & Hall, 1983). Chaplin *et al*., (2000) further opine that handshaking is a common greeting behaviour and is often one of the first observations that individuals make of each other upon meeting. The handshake, thus, may be a basis for some of the initial impression that an individual forms about another. Huwer (2003) adds that there are many social and interpersonal messages that can be discerned by observing handshake interactions. Handshakes serve a communicative function and can supplicate or replace verbal exchanges, such as "hello" and "I agree." In this regard handshakes are classified as gestures. Manusov and Milstein (2005) study of the 1993 Rabin-Arafat handshake revealed that the act of handshaking can represent peace, optimism and legitimacy of the process and those involved in it.

Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on Systemic Functional Grammar Theory (henceforth referred to as SFG). The theory was propounded by Halliday in 1975. The central concern of SFG is on how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meaning. The SFG has three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. The three metafunctions are reflected in a huge system network, which specifies all the meaning potentials (Lin & Peng, 2006). The ideational metafunction is mainly represented by the transitivity system in grammar. In this system the meaningful grammatical unit is *clause* which expresses what is happening, what is being done, what's felt and what the state is and so on (Yumin, 2007). The transitivity system includes six processes: material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioural process and existential process. Material process is that of doing and happening: a 'material' clause construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). These processes are expressed by an action verb (e.g. eat, go, give), an Actor (logical subject) and the Goal of the action (logical direct object, usually a noun or a pronoun).

Relational process serves to characterize and to identify (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). There are two types of relational clauses: attributive and identifying clauses. Class-membership is construed by attributive clauses and identity by identifying ones. Behavioural processes are of (typically human) physiological and psychological behaviour, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The participant, who is 'behaving', is labelled behaver. Existential processes represent that something exists or happens (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This study applied ideational metafunction in the analysis of the discourse on the Uhuru-Raila handshake to evaluate its effect on the perception of Kenyans.

The interpersonal metafunction is both interactive and personal. Whenever we use language there is always something else going on. While construing, language is always also enacting: enacting our personal and social relationships with the other people around us. The clause of the grammar is not only a figure, representing some process; it is also a proposition, or a proposal, whereby we inform or question, give an order or make an offer and express our appraisal of and attitude towards whoever we are addressing and what we are talking about (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Zhuanglin (1988:313) points out: 'The interpersonal function embodies all uses of language to express social and personal relations. This includes the various ways the speaker enters a speech situation and performs a speech act.'

Textual metafunction can be regarded as an enabling or facilitating function, since both the others — construing experience and enacting interpersonal relations —depend on being able to build up sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The textual function

refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences. Although two sentences may have exactly the same ideational and interpersonal functions, they may be different in terms of textual coherence (Zhuanglin 1988, p. 315).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted analytical research design domiciled within the qualitative methods to achieve its objective. According to Kosterec (2015) the analytical design is used to obtain, decode or make explicit information which is hidden, encoded or entailed by the information in a pre-existing knowledge base. The study area was library. It focused on national news and editorial sections of the two major dailies in Kenya: *The Daily Nation* (henceforth referred to as DN) and *The Standard Newspapers* (henceforth referred to as SN). The study population constituted 730 dailies (both *The Standard Newspaper* and *The Daily Nation*) covering the period between 9th March, 2018 and 9th March, 2019. Purposive sampling was used to arrive at 70 dailies that had got relevant information pertaining to the Uhuru-Raila handshake. This is in line with Hill (1998) assertion that within the limits (30-500) the use of a sample of about ten percent size of the parent population is recommended. The dailies considered either had Uhuru-Raila handshake in the national news section or in the editorial sections. Saturated sampling was employed to arrive at 9 sentences; 5 from *The Standard Newspaper* and 4 from *Daily Nation*. Data was collected using corpus compilation the method and extraction guide was considered as the data collection instruments. The data collected was thematically analysed and presented in continuous prose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Kenya, the handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and ODM leader, Raila Odinga, on 9th March, 2018 elicited diverse discourse. It was thus imperative to undertake an analysis of the handshake discourse in the print with a view to evaluating the effect the handshake had on perception of Kenyans. The study revealed that the handshake had a mixed effect on the perception of Kenyans at political, social and economic spheres.

Political perception

The handshake has significantly influenced the perception of Kenyans on the country's political sphere. It has led to a mixed perception of both President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila Odinga. The same is true about the political activities in the country.

The handshake has significantly influenced how Kenyans perceive both President Uhuru Kenyatta and ODM leader Raila in both positive and negative way as discussed below.

Sentence 1: Opposition chief and the President struck deal to forestall chaos being planned by their supporters (DN)

Opposition chief and the President	struck deal	to *forestall* chaos being planned by their supporters
Actors	Material process	Goal

In sentence (1) the reporter uses the lexicon *forestall* with the denotation to prevent something from happening by doing something first. It brings to the limelight the fact that the two leaders were cognizant of what was going on and what would happen in the country. They thus intentionally *struck deal*, signified by the handshake in this context, with forestalling chaos that was being planned by their supporters as their prime *Goal*. The use of the word forestall portrays the *Actors*, both President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila, as responsible and patriotic leaders who are ready to take concrete steps to prevent chaos that would plunge the country into a state of anarchy. They are ready to forfeit their personal interests for the sake of the country. This is a positive attribution owing to the fact that both President Uhuru and Raila Odinga were the antagonist in the 2017 presidential elections in Kenya.

Sentence 2: "Victims of 'state brutality' are however pessimistic about the 'bromance' between the two…" (DN)

Victims of 'state brutality	are however pessimistic	about the '*bromance*	between the two…
Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Circumstance

In sentence (2) v*ictims of police brutality* are the *Sensers.* They are the individuals who suffered the consequences of state aggression during the chaotic 2017 elections. The lexeme *bromance* has the denotation a close relationship between two men. The reporter intentionally refers to the Uhuru-Raila handshake as a *bromance* to associate with victims of state brutality and empathize with them. Bromance is the *phenomenon* that the victims feel pessimistic about. They feel this relationship is not bound to last thus the use of the lexeme pessimistic. The usage of the term bromance makes the handshake an exclusive affair between President Uhuru and Raila Odinga. This view is reinforced by the circumstantial element *between the two*. In this light, the handshake only serves the interest of President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila Odinga. They are thus perceived as egocentric individuals who are driven by their selfish interests.

Sentence 3: Raila showed that he could not be trusted (SN)

Raila	*Showed*	that he could not be trusted
Actor	Material Process	*Attribute*

In sentence (3) Raila's (*Actor*) decision to engage President Uhuru alone without the knowledge of other NASA co-principals is seen in light of his personality. The attribute *that he could not be trusted* depicts him as untrustworthy. The usage of the high modal, *could not*, in the attribute reinforces the impossibility of bestowing trust upon Mr. Odinga. Raila's handshake with President Uhuru is considered an act of betrayal of the other NASA leaders by his coalition partners. The deliberate choice of the verb *showed* makes it clear that Raila earned himself this perception as a result of his decision to secretly engage with President Uhuru.

Sentence 4: Wiper accuses ODM of playing selfish politics (SN)

Wiper	*Accuses*	*ODM*	of playing *selfish politics*
Sayer	Verbal Process	Target	Circumstance

In sentence (4) Wiper (*Sayer*) accuses (verbal *process*) ODM (*Target*) of playing selfish politics (*Circumstance*). The Sayer uses the lexeme *selfish* to refer Mr. Odinga's (ODM leader) move to engage President Uhuru without other NASA co-principals. The lexeme *selfish* has the negative denotation of self-seeking at the expense of others. The term is used to premodify politics since the deal between President Uhuru and Raila is a politic one. ODM as a political organization is accused wholesomely since its leader Raila Odinga made the deliberate decision to engage President Uhuru, the leader of the Jubilee party. According to the Wiper Party, Raila's handshake with President reveals his trait as a self-centered politician. This is definitely a change in perception occasioned by the handshake considering the fact that Wiper Party was one of the parties in the NASA coalition with ODM party among others.

In terms of political activities in the country, the handshake has had both positive and negative impact on the perception of Kenyans as well. On the positive side, the handshake has toned down political activities and pacified political differences as exemplified below.

Sentence 5: …the country has experienced immense tranquility… (DN)

…the country	has experienced	*immense tranquility*
Senser	Mental Process	Phenomenon

In sentence (5) *the country* is the *Senser* while *immense tranquility* is the Phenomenon that has been experienced. The reporter chooses the noun phrase *the country* with the connotation all Kenyans to advance his stance that the effect of the handshake has been felt across the country. There is prevailing peace in the country occasioned by the handshake. Peace had eluded the country due to the disputed 2017 presidential elections. In addition, he uses modifier *immense* with tranquility to magnify the peace in the country and emphasize its significance. By assigning the *country* the role of a Senser, the reporter objectively makes it clear to his readership or the mass that the Uhuru-Raila handshake is responsible for the pacification of the political hostility that marred the country prior to the handshake.

Sentence 6: Mr. Mudavadi cautioned against suffocating opposition by engaging in questionable deals with Jubilee administration (SN)

Mr. Mudavadi	Cautioned	against *suffocating* opposition by engaging in questionable deals with Jubilee administration
Sayer	Verbal Process	Verbiage

In sentence (6) the *Sayer*, Mr. Mudavadi, is one of the NASA principals and the leader of Amani National Congress Party (henceforth referred to as ANC). He *cautioned* (verbal *process*) *against suffocating opposition by engaging in questionable deals with Jubilee administration* (*verbiage*). He is not categorical on his target that he warns not to suffocate the opposition. However, based on the context it can be assumed to be ODM leader Raila who has had a deal with President Uhuru. The use of the verb *suffocating* in its progressive form is intentional. Suffocating has the denotation killing by not letting breathe air. The opposition has been depicted as something that has life and can be killed by being deprived air. In this context life refers to being active and performing what the opposition is mandated to undertake. That is, keeping the government on toes. Mr. Mudavadi considers the handshake between President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila as an impediment to the opposition's role. This shows he perceives the deal as extremely detrimental

and does not approve of it since it is capable of literary killing the opposition. He strongly believes that the handshake would seriously incapacitate the opposition on its mandate of keeping the government on toes and equates the handshake to progressive death of opposition in the country. He also echoes his negative attitude towards the handshake.

Social perception

Socially, the handshake has had pure positive impact on perception of Kenyans. They now positively perceive their erstwhile political opponents and appreciate the transformation occasioned by the phenomenon.

Sentence 7: Kenyans view each other less as an anathema (SN)

Kenyans	View	each other	less as an anathema
Theme	mental process	complement	Circumstantial adjunct

Sentence (7) is a headline of an editorial. The editor positions *Kenyans* as Theme of the sentence purposefully to portray an image of unity amongst citizens of the country. His choice of the word rather than phrases like Jubilee and NASA supporters that would still remind President Uhuru and Raila supporters of their political differences is aimed at promoting unity in the country. The mental process *view* highlights the change in the mental faculty of Kenyans occasioned by the handshake. The complement *each other* anaphorically refers to Kenyans thus reinforces unity as a message. The circumstantial adjunct of manner *less as an anathema* explicitly states the positive impact of the handshake. That is, reducing political hostilities that characterized 2017 electioneering period that was punctuated by crude political competition. The handshake can therefore be said to have transformed the perception of Kenyans in terms of politics for supporters of either Jubilee or NASA who were fierce competitors no longer view each other as rivals.

Sentence 8: It is upon them to take their new-found rapport a notch higher…(SN)

It	Is	upon them to take their *new-found rapport* a notch higher…
Theme	*Process*	*New information*

In sentence (8) the editor describes the handshake as a *new-found rapport* between President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila in the editorial. The modifier appears in the *Rheme* part of the sentence. He uses the premodifier *new-found* to acknowledge the fact that the leaders never related so before and this is a new development. There were political differences before and after the repeat October 26, 2017 presidential election in Kenya and the two were at the epicenter of the aforementioned differences. The term *rapport* denotes a friendly relationship. It echoes the fact that political hostility between the two and by extension between their supporters is now a thing of the past. The two leaders and by extension their supporters now perceive each other as friends.

Economic perception

Economically, the handshake had significantly resulted into a sense of optimism amongst Kenyans on the country's economic prosperity.

Sentence 9: In the name of the handshake, the shilling has stabilized overnight. (DN)

In the name of the handshake	the shilling	*has stabilized*	Overnight
Circumstance	Carrier	Attribute	Circumstance

In sentence (9) the reporter uses present perfect aspect *has stabilized* to refer to the performance of the Kenya Shillings against other major world currencies such as the US dollar. *Has stabilized* with denotation has become steady or firm is an *attribute* of the Kenya shilling. The use of the present perfect aspect brings to the fore the resultant impact of Uhuru-Raila handshake on the economy of the country. The circumstantial adjunct of time *overnight* emphasizes on the rapid economic turn-around occasioned by the handshake. The stability of the Kenya shillings is a pointer to an economic growth. As such, the handshake is equivalent to economic revitalization from an economic perspective.

CONCLUSION

The study objective was to analyse the Uhuru-Raila 9th March, 2018 handshake discourse to determine the effect it had on the perception of Kenyans. The findings were that the handshake had significant political, social and economic influence on the perception of Kenyans. Politically, the handshake has substantially influenced how Kenyans perceive President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila Odinga both positively and negatively. In particular, both President Uhuru and ODM leader Raila Odinga have been perceived as responsible, patriotic and egocentric. Furthermore, Raila has been perceived untrustworthy. Political activities in the country have also been perceived both positively and negatively thanks to the handshake. There has been pacification of political

hostility on the positive and impediment to the role of opposition in the country on the other. Socially, the handshake has led to social harmony amongst Kenyans and improved interpersonal relationships. From economic perspective, the handshake has birthed hopes of economic revitalization amongst Kenyans.

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