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**A Pragmatic Analysis of Gikuyu Euphemisms Used As Face-Saving
Acts in The Gikuyu Political Discourse in Kiambu County, Kenya**



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A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF GIKUYU EUPHEMISMS USED AS FACE-SAVING ACTS IN THE GIKUYU POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In Kenya today, many politicians have faced significant backlash from the public regarding their statements, often attributing their situations to being “misquoted”. For a politician, being straightforward can lead to dismissal from their elective or appointed positions or result in the loss of an elected position. As a result, politicians frequently opt for indirect communication to maintain their reputations, often using euphemisms. This study focused on politicians from the Central Region of Kenya, specifically Kiambu County, who speak Gikuyu, which is the language relevant to the research topic. The research examined the discourse of 10 politicians, comprising 5 women and 5 men. The three main objectives of the study were: (a) to analyze the Gikuyu euphemisms used by politicians in Kiambu County as face-saving strategies; (b) to explore how politicians utilize euphemisms to protect their public image; and (c) to assess the impact of these euphemisms on the electorate.

Methodology: The study primarily referenced Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory, along with other related materials on politeness. The researcher gathered data through direct interviews at live political rallies and by observing attendees at these events. Primary data was collected from these sources, while secondary data was sourced from recorded Gikuyu political speeches available on YouTube, as well as from radio and television interviews. The gathered data were analyzed qualitatively using Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1978, 1987) as the framework. A purposive sampling technique was employed for the study.

Findings: The findings indicated that politicians frequently use euphemisms as a method of saving face in their public discourse.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study recommends raising public awareness of political euphemisms.

Key Words: *Gikuyu Euphemisms, Face-Saving Strategies, Public Image, and Electorate*

Background of the Study

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), being polite entails speaking and acting with concern for the hearer's feelings and desires. Politicians run the danger of losing the public's support if they don't seem courteous when speaking to their constituents. For remarks that the public deemed offensive, many have lost their seats. Following public outcry over a number of their public statements, they occasionally come out to claim they were misquoted. For example, a popular former governor from the Central region once made blatantly defamatory remarks about the then leader of opposition, stating, “Tūtige gūtindaga ūhorō wa ihī hīndī ciothe.” (‘Let's stop dwelling on issues raised by uncircumcised men all the time.’) This remark sparked public outrage, prompting calls for the National Cohesion Integrity Commission Act. According to the NCIC Act (2018), a person engages in hate speech if they use threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior, or display any written materials intended to stir up ethnic hatred. For this reason, politicians often resort to euphemisms to stay on the safe side with their audience.

Indirect Speech: Euphemisms.

Originally, euphemisms were used to avoid obscene or taboo words in society, such as names of private parts and biological body functions like excretion. However, politicians have adapted these terms to mask their real intentions to align with politeness norms, Mihas (2010). Euphemisms allow politicians to maintain a politically correct image and reduce conflict with their audience. While some politicians may use euphemisms to be polite, others employ them to misinform or avoid accountability. For example, taxation in Kenya often receives much backlash from citizens, leading politicians to sweeten the term with phrases like “savings” or even “mortgage”. The term “savings” implies that citizens’ contributions will yield personal benefits. The phrase “Hustler Nation,” coined by the 4th Kenyan president, Dr. William Ruto, during his 2022 presidential campaign, resonated with young people struggling in the economy, further illustrating the power of euphemisms to connect with voters. Another term, “hot air,” refers to valueless information and was used by Chief Justice Martha Koome during the presidential election petition ruling in 2022. Politicians, tasked with convincing the public to vote for them, leverage euphemisms as persuasive tools. They may avoid direct language to maintain their reputations or to address unpleasant issues without alienating listeners. For instance, “amepumzika” means ‘s/he has died’ in a softened manner, while “s/he has left the job to pursue other interests” means ‘s/he has been fired.’ Language is intertwined with politics, and euphemisms are frequently used to achieve political correctness rather than confront uncomfortable truths Galperin (1977).

Speeches are often tailored to align with the ideological and cultural predispositions of their audiences to elicit favorable responses. Linguists such as Gomez (2009), Linfoot (2005), and Burrige (1998) assert that euphemisms in political speech can serve to deceive or make contentious topics more palatable. For instance, politicians may refer to government overspending as “investment” or describe embezzlement as “money lost.” The media plays a crucial role in propagating euphemisms, often polishing politicians’ statements to manipulate public perception.

The term “spin” in media parlance is synonymous with euphemism; it can either positively or negatively shape the public image of politicians based on the media’s bias. As Linda Wertheimer from National Public Radio New York puts it, spin is “not quite lying” and “not quite truth.”

Statement of the Problem

Politicians are known to adjust their language during campaigns to appeal to the masses. This practice continues in their daily political discourse, especially when pressing an agenda on reluctant citizens. The necessity for appealing and socially acceptable language is evident, leading this study to analyze how euphemisms serve as face-saving acts in political communication.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To analyze Gikuyu euphemisms used as face-saving acts by politicians in Kiambu County of Kenya;
- ii. To examine how politicians utilize euphemisms to protect the face of the hearer;
- iii. To evaluate the influence of euphemisms employed by politicians on the electorate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Related Studies

Goro (2014) investigated the driving forces behind Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) among matatu conductors in a qualitative research project. His primary source of data was naturally occurring talks between touts and passengers, guided by Culpeper's (1996) Impoliteness Strategies and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. By identifying five rudeness tactics employed in these exchanges, the study shed light on how euphemisms can lessen FTAs. Goro (2014) investigated the driving forces underlying Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) by matatu conductors in a qualitative study. His main source of data was naturally occurring talks between conductors and passengers, guided by Culpeper's (1996) Impoliteness Strategies and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. By identifying five rudeness tactics employed in these exchanges, the study shed light on how euphemisms can lessen FTAs.

Another notable study by Kithenge (2018) explored FTAs and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs) in the Kamba language during electioneering in Mwingi. Employing the same theoretical framework, the research highlighted how politicians employ euphemisms as strategies to evade political responsibility. This study informs the current research on the application of euphemisms as FSAs. Waithira (2018) explored politeness strategies among teachers in Kirinyaga County, emphasizing the types of strategies used when addressing superiors. By examining conversations in the staffroom, her qualitative study revealed insights into how politeness strategies play a role in saving face, facilitating comparisons with euphemisms employed as FSAs. My study focuses on the application of Gikuyu euphemisms as FSAs within Gikuyu political discourse.

Background Usage of Euphemisms

Euphemisms and Rhetoric

Rhetoric, defined as the art of persuasive discourse McNally (1970), is integral to political communication. Politicians utilize rhetorical strategies and euphemisms to avoid conflict and FTAs, as noted by Mihas (2005), who highlights the established yet questionable practice of euphemizing in political discourse. Such language can lead to the manipulation of information, resulting in misleading perceptions among the public. Arif (2015) indicates that the prevalence of abrasive expressions in contemporary speech has made euphemisms essential tools for masking unpleasant truths, with Fowler (2000) emphasizing that they expose a tendency toward evasion and deceit. Euphemisms may be employed both subconsciously and consciously, serving to navigate contentious phrases and facilitate social interactions. Drawing from classical rhetoric, particularly Aristotle's concepts of logos, ethos, and pathos, politicians can employ euphemisms to persuade diverse audiences effectively. Examples from U.S. military language reveal euphemisms that soften the realities of war and civilian casualties, reinforcing the manipulative capacity of such language in political discourse. Historical examples, such as Tony Blair's softening of military actions, further illustrate the strategic use of euphemisms to obscure realities from public scrutiny. Euphemisms also reflect political correctness, serving dual functions related to taboo and politeness Neaman (1983). Politicians frequently employ euphemisms to address opponents or discuss sensitive issues, thereby maintaining face and cohesion within social interactions.

Types of Euphemisms

Howard (1982) categorizes euphemisms into two main groups: Negative Euphemisms, which diminish or deflect meaning, and Positive Euphemisms, which inflate or enhance meaning. Positive euphemisms often serve occupational purposes, elevating titles and roles to promote social dignity. In politics, these euphemisms disguise controversial matters and avoid FTAs. For instance, using the term "investment" may obscure misconduct or embezzlement, reflecting how euphemisms dynamically develop within language. Euphemisms may also exhibit understatement, reducing the impact of FTAs. Terms like "out of control" for a nuclear reactor can obscure harsher realities. Moreover, euphemistic expressions in Kenyan political discourse, such as "fuel stabilizers" replacing "Subsidies" illustrate how new euphemisms emerge to navigate negative connotations while actively manipulating public perception.

Table 1: How Euphemisms Support Politeness

| Function | How euphemism supports politeness | Example |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Avoiding offense | Softens unpleasant truths | “Passed away” instead of “died” ameenda, ametuacha; ako ndani |
| Showing respect | Avoids directness toward people, voters, students, church members, or taboo topics (sex, death) | “Mzee amepumzika” for “amekufa” |
| Maintain harmony | Reduces confrontation or embarrassment e.g. between couples, politicians, co-workers, community members | “Let you go” for “fire”; hana kitu siku hizi; kutangatanga, etc. |
| Upholding social norms | Fits cultural expectations of discretion | “Anaenda kujisaidia” for bodily needs; ana bol, |

Theoretical Framework

Politeness functions within a system of interpersonal relations aimed at reducing conflict during interactions Yule (2017). Maintaining harmonious conversations is crucial, as interaction often involves balancing the desires of multiple participants. Language communities, therefore, cultivate strategies to reduce tensions, fostering smooth communication.

Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that notions of ‘face’ and ‘rationality’ guide linguistic behavior across cultures. Their framework identifies the necessity of politeness as a counter to impoliteness, linked to Grice’s (1975) maxims. Utilizing euphemisms typically involves a reduction of information to protect the listener’s face, exemplifying the intertwined nature of politeness and language.

Assumptions and properties of interactants

According to Brown and Levinson, every competent adult in a society has assumptions about face, defined as the public self-image desired in interactions. They distinguish between negative face—the desire for autonomy—and positive face—the need for approval. Understanding these dynamics helps illustrate how euphemisms facilitate positive interactions.

Notion of Face, Negative and Positive Face.

The concept of face emphasizes the importance of desirable self-images, particularly in political discourse, where politicians often utilize euphemisms to craft positive impressions on listeners. A positive face is a desire to be accepted even liked by others, Sukarno (2018). It is also a desire to be treated as a member of the same group. A positive face and a member of the group must be linked. Negative face denoting the desire not to be imposed upon.

Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) presented two broad politeness strategies; Positive and Negative Politeness. Each one reflects a unique method of managing FTAs, particularly vital in the context of political communication. Negative politeness entails the desire not to be imposed, Waziana et al;(2021). Negative politeness minimizes imposition. Situations that threaten negative face include orders and requests. Positive politeness entails the desire to be liked.

Table 2: Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987)

| Type | Main goal | Linguistic strategies | Cultural Expressions |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Positive Politeness | Build warmth, belonging, and solidarity | Inclusive pronouns (“we”) e.g. we the Mountain people, ‘we are...’ compliments, joking, hospitality: karibu! Tuko pamoja! | Sharing food using kinship terms (ndugu yangu/zangu; mtu wangu; my brother;), casual tone |
| Negative Politeness | Show respect, avoid imposition | Indirectness, greetings, apologizing, softeners: e.g., Vijana wetu, mheshimiwa; Madam, house manager. | “Shikamoo,” honorifics, respectful distance, lowered tone e.g. in front of the president; curtsying |

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design. This research focused specifically on ten politicians from Kiambu County who primarily communicated in Gikuyu, as the study concerned euphemisms in the language. To ensure gender balance, the sample consisted of five men and five women. This research employed two primary instruments: interviews and field observations. Primary data were gathered at political gatherings such as rallies and barazas. Secondary data included YouTube videos and audio recordings featuring Gikūyū-speaking politicians from Kiambu County, as well as information from published sources such as newspapers, posters, articles, advertisements, and political commentaries. The data underwent content analysis and were subsequently tabulated to categorize the euphemisms used by politicians, along with their frequencies. The findings were presented in tables.

RESULTS

Data Presentation and Interpretation

This section presents and interprets the data using tables. Each table features five Gikuyu utterances, their literal English translations, and interpretations of the corresponding euphemisms.

These elements are highlighted in both languages for clarity. The utterances were subsequently analyzed based on the politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson (1978).

Table 3: CANDIDATE M1

| Utterance | Literal Translation | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|--|---|--|---|
| Thikū ici maranjīta mūka wa X | Nowadays, they are calling me the wife of X. | The speaker is being accused of being subservient to a more senior politician. | The speaker uses euphemism to reduce confrontation or embarrassment to the audience (Negative Politeness) |
| Mūndū ūrenda kūnūngūra kanua, aranungūra na nie | Anyone who wants to get rid of foul smell from their mouth is using my name nowadays | The speaker alludes to idle talk and mud-slinging by his opponents. | Indirect, off record. Indirect, off record, avoids directness and confrontation. (Negative Politeness) |
| Tiga kūonga thigino ya mūrīmī. | Stop sucking the peasants' sweat. | Accuses of stealing from the poor. | Negative politeness, avoids names and words ('steal') to soften an unpleasant truth. |
| Mbeca cia muingi no kwenyūrwo ire nyūrwo | Public money continues to be stolen. | Reference to theft of public funds. | Indirect, an understatement to soften an unpleasant truth. |
| Ndūngūka kūnegenia mūndū mūthure nī andū na wee nīwaremirwo nīgūthurwo nginya governor | You cannot come here and start questioning anyone when you could not even be elected governor. | the speaker avoids calling his opponent a failure. | Indirect, off record. Avoids naming opponent to avoid confrontation or embarrassment. |

Table 4: CANDIDATE M2

| Utterance | Literal translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|---|--|---|--|
| Andū aitu tūtikahakwo macūrū | My people, we are not to be smearred with porridge | I/We should not be trivialized. | Positive politeness, building solidarity by using inclusive pronouns. |
| Ndīmwīraga mūtikanagua gūe na kūrenga mwaki | I have always told you that you should not be cowed or dim your lights | Voters should refuse to be intimidated. | Indirect reduces confrontation to maintain social harmony (Negative Politeness) |
| Rekei ciana ciūke cirīkie, ciambe cikiē wana | Let the children come first, finish being childish | The speaker is referring to his opponents as children to mean they are naïve politically, and they lack political experience. | Indirect, upholding social norms by avoiding embarrassment in the audience (there may be supporters of the opponent in the crowd!) or confrontation with addressee (who is not present). |
| Nie ndiathire University ūhoro wa kūhorania ūcūrū | I did not go to the university to study how to cool porridge | It is euphemism for intelligent but with an audience with different levels of education one saves face by not announcing how intelligent one is. | Use of humor, building warmth and solidarity with audience of ordinary people (Positive politeness) |
| Mūdū umīte mburaine ndangienda gūcoka mburaine | Someone coming from the rain cannot wish to go back to the rain. | The rains here are a euphemism for being in the opposition. The speaker compares the opposition to rain and reminds his audience that one would not wish to go back. | Indirect, fits cultural expectations of discretion [about party hopping]. Negative Politeness. |

Table 5: Candidate M3

| Utterance | Literal Translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy. |
|--|--|--|---|
| Icio mbeca ciathiaga Pakistan nīguo? Itwaritwo nīaria mekaga ma tender kūu. Rīu irarīo nī andū. | The money is taken to Pakistan, right? It is taken there, so that they can do tendering there, right now, the money is being eaten up by people. | The speaker indirectly means that money is being stolen by unnamed people through a foreign country. | Indirect, avoids direct confrontation or embarrassment by not giving names or mentioning the word ‘steal.’ It softens the unpleasant truth. (Negative Politeness) |
| Iganda icio cirahingwo, ithe ti andū marekagīra mbeca mūhuko. | The factories were all closed down because people were putting money in their pockets. | People were stealing money. Unnamed but known ‘people’ are stealing money. | Indirect, the speaker avoids direct confrontation by avoiding name mentioning of those he accuses of stealing. (negative politeness) |
| Rīrīa ndathire ngiuga twambe tunyitane naūrīa twambire kūnyitana nake, ndekire ūguo nīūdū wa thayū. | I went and decided that we should join hands with the one I decided to join hands with. I did that for peace’s sake. | The speaker avoids name mentioning of the person he joined hands with as he is not highly acceptable in the speaker’s community. | The speaker is indirect in reference to an unpleasant choice. Avoidance. (Negative politeness). |
| Woka haha na mbeca iria ūrarīa, nī mbeca ciagīrīrwo nī gutwarwīrwo andū a Elgeyo Marakwet make ndaamu. Kwīna andū marahūyūka, acio, acio nī andū mataramenya kūrīa marathie. | When you come here with the money that you are eating, that money should be taken to Elgeyo Marakwet and help in dam building. Some people are just shouting; they are people who do not know where they are headed to. | The speaker avoids naming a fellow politician who is eating (stealing) people’s money Unnamed ‘people’ who just make reckless talk. | Indirect reference to corrupt politicians. Negative politeness to avoid confrontation and fit cultural expectations of discretion. Indirectly, no names mentioned to avoid confrontation or embarrassment. (Negative Politeness) |

Table 6: Candidate M4

| Utterance | Literal translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|---|--|--|---|
| Pay slips niciahagūrirwo andū no kīrīro. | Pay slips were turned upside down ; people are crying. | Pay slips suffer heavy tax deductions. | Indirect reference to a current national topic, to soften an unpleasant truth. (Negative politeness) |
| Thirikari iranyita ciana mīgwate na gūita thakame. | The government is abducting children and shedding blood | The government is killing innocent people. | Bald on record. The speaker in his utterance makes an indirect reference to killings. He softens unpleasant truths. |
| Andū acio mūraigua nīyo tūreta kunda ngūtūme. | Those are the people that we call, sip, I am sending you | Some politicians are reduced to errand boys/girls. | Indirect reference to ‘turncoat’ politicians bought for money or favors. (Negative Politeness). |
| Amwe monganīte nīguo mahūre nyūmba īno itu. | Some people have come to fight at our house | ‘our’ Gikuyu community is under attack. | Building solidarity with audience with use of inclusive words and pronouns. (Positive politeness). |
| Turaugire andū aitu matikamomorerwo manyuba. | We agreed that our people should not be demolished for houses | ‘our’ Gikuyu people | Showing solidarity with inclusive pronoun ‘our’ (Positive politeness .) |

Table 7: Candidate M5

| Utterance | Literal translation | Interpretation | Politeness strategy. |
|--|---|--|---|
| Mwaugire nīmūgūtūwīkīra mbeca mūhuko | You said that you would put money into our pockets. | Leaders had promised to improve the economy. | The speaker avoids direct confrontation with the current leadership about their false promises they made during campaigns. The euphemism is used to avoid offense on those in government. (negative politeness) |
| Ithuī nītūrīkanitie na mūdū ūcio biū | We have cut all ties with that person. | The speaker avoids mentioning the name of a political rival. | The speaker avoids name mentioning, thus reduces future confrontation with the person in question. The euphemism serves to maintain harmony. (Positive politeness). |
| Atongoria ainge matuīkīte andū akūhūra rūhī | Most of the leaders have become clappers. | They have become people pleasers. | Indirect reference is made. The speaker avoids directness, thus maintaining harmony and showing respect. (negative politeness) |
| Kwīna atongoria merutīte kūoya indo ciarī na ene hau kabere. | Some leaders are now discovering properties that had previous owners. | People stealing from others | The speaker makes an indirect reference to ‘stealing’. This softens an unpleasant truth and thus avoids offence. (negative politeness) |
| Mbeca citagakworwo ciraingīra thitoo, cikaumīra mwena ūyū ūngī wa irima. | Let it not be that money comes through one side of the store and then goes through the hole on the other side. | Money is being stolen. | The speaker makes an indirect reference to stealing. The euphemism here softens an unpleasant truth. (positive politeness) |

Table 8: Candidate F1

| Utterance | Literal translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|---|--|--|---|
| Ng̃iona t̃uret̃wara g̃ith̃inj̃iro , t̃ũth̃ie t̃ũkanorio, t̃ũga thiñjwo r̃ũcio. | We took ourselves to the slaughterhouse , where we were being fattened to be slaughtered the next day. | The opposition | The speaker makes an indirect reference to those in the opposition side. She shows respect to those in the opposition and avoids future confrontation. (Off record, negative politeness.) |
| Andũ ainge mathiete kũhang̃ira ndaa ciao . | Most people are there to take care of their stomachs | Selfish leaders who only care of their interests | The euphemism has been used as an indirect reference to greedy leaders. It reduces confrontation with those involved. (Off record, negative politeness) |
| Ngiciria noanga athire ag̃ikũmwo, ngiona ta atonyia heho kidogo . | I thought he went there and was reprimanded He went cold . | He became scared and could not defend his constituents. | The speaker refuses to call her opponent a coward thus maintains harmony between her and the opponent. (Off record, negative politeness.) |
| Mwaugire nikaba g̃ith̃ikati . | You people decided that you wanted a skirt | A woman leader. | The euphemism shows respect to the female gender. (positive politeness) |
| Ñindorona w̃ina ka badge ka statehouse, ndiũĩ kana w̃imũtũmwa . | I see you wearing a statehouse badge. I do not know if you are their spy . | One who spies for the ruling government. | The speaker makes an indirect reference to one who spies for the government, avoiding confrontation with the reference's person. Negative politeness. |

Table 9: Candidate F2

| Utterance | Literal translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy. |
|---|--|---|---|
| Kwīna atetia a kīrīma gīkī mahurūkītie meciria. | Some politicians from the mountain have put their thoughts to rest | Not using one's brains. | The speaker avoids showing disrespect to her political rivals by making indirect reference. (negative politeness) |
| Ateti aya aitu tūngīmacukuma, tūngīkarata athūngū. | If we were to push our politicians, we could live like the white people | Live a good life. | The speaker upholds social norms by making pleasant statements. Positive politeness. |
| Mūtige kuhinyīria arūme na kūmatwara mūkerūro | You should stop oppressing men by taking them to alcohol dens | Alcohol dens. | The speaker tries to maintain harmony with her audience and uses a softer word for alcohol dens. Positive politeness. |
| Ūcoke ūnjīre tuume Thirikari tūthie anga kū. | And then you tell me to leave the government and go, I don't know where. | The speaker avoids mentioning the opposition. | Indirect reference to her political rivals' camp, this avoids confrontation from her counterparts. Negative politeness. |
| Nīmūkūririkana mbara īria ndarīmirwo. | Do you remember the beating I received? | Attacked verbally. | The speaker tries to lighten what she went through, (verbal attack) Positive politeness. |

Table 10: Candidate F3

| Utterance | Literal translation | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|---|---|--|---|
| Kūrī andū maramūtūma emūoyo mamenyerere matigathonge mbere. | Euphemism Some people are sending him ; they should be careful lest they go before him. | Wishing him dead whilst he is alive. lest they die before him. | The speaker makes an indirect reference to death. This helps her uphold social norm as death is not to be mentioned recklessly. Positive politeness. |
| Tūriokuo na Ngai ona ciathira kara. | We are still there with God even when they lose color. | A hopeless situation. | The speaker uses a softer term as she tries to encourage her audience. Positive politeness. |
| Ambunge aya tūitaga kwaya a mündū ūyū wī wathanine. | These legislatures that we call the choir belong to the person we elected. | A choir- a group of people who keeps praising the ruling regime without questioning. This person, the speaker knows who she is referring to but avoids name mentioning. | Indirect reference. The speaker avoids future confrontation with her opponents and tries to maintain harmony. Negative politeness. |
| Andū ainge matuikīte agūthie statehouse magathukīrwo kiondo | Most politicians have become people who go to the statehouse to be lifted for a basket | Bribery. | An indirect reference to corruption/bribery. The euphemism maintains harmony between the speaker and those allegedly receive bribes. Negative politeness. |
| Hindī īngī tūtigetīkīra gūthie ithurano na ngari ya gūkomborwo | Never again will we go for elections in a borrowed vehicle. | Other people's political parties. | Indirect reference. The speaker avoids being offensive to those who belong to other political parties. Negative politeness. |

Table 11: Candidate F4

| Utterance | Literal translation Euphemism | Interpretation | Politeness strategy |
|--|---|--|---|
| Mündū ūyū amekire sure andū arīa maheo tigiti marī tūgege . | This person made sure that those who were given tickets were headless . | Those allowed to contest were headless and naïve. | The speaker makes an indirect reference to people who are not independent thinkers. The euphemism used softens unpleasant truth and hence the speaker avoids offending the person she is referring to. (Negative politeness) |
| Rūrīrī ruitū nītūhītagia mūno nīgūthura thuti . | As a region, we make mistakes by electing suits | Leaders from the same political party. | The speaker is friendly when she uses the term, it helps maintain harmony between her and her audience. (Positive politeness.) |
| Turacokanīrīrie tūrauga Kirinyaga ti ya mūka ūrīa mwerū . | We came together and said that Kirinyaga did not belong to the new wife . | A political leader from another tribe. | The speaker avoids offending those in other political parties. The euphemism serves to maintain harmony. (negative politeness) |
| Mündū ūcio niwe watūmire ciana citū cia tūhū cimirwo . | That person is the one who made our boys be squeezed | Boys were castrated. | The speaker uses the euphemism to uphold social norms by not mentioning castration, this creates a good rapport between her and her audience. (positive politeness). |
| Kwīna marokite makīenda gūtūhenia. | andū gūkū Some people had come here intending to lie to us. | Leaders from the opposition. | The speaker avoids mentioning the leader of opposition, this helps to maintain harmony between her and the opposition supporters. (Positive politeness). |

Table 12: Candidate F5

| Utterance | Literal translation | Interpretation. | Politeness strategy. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mūtinde mūmemerekītie kīroko na mūtikarīrio nī mūndū kaī mūtangīhīnjio nī maku. | You keep on broadcasting every morning and you do not want anybody to ask you, why can't yours thin you. | Why can't you mind your own business? | The speaker makes an indirect reference to avoid offending those she is referring to consequently maintaining harmony. (Negative politeness) |
| Gwakinya kīroko mūgatūmemere kia kūringana no ūrīa mūhetwo mbia. | When morning comes, you broadcast us depending on how much you've been paid | You have been bribed. | The speaker makes an indirect reference to bribery. The euphemism softens unpleasant truth. Bald on record. |
| Nīithue tūracokanīria kana he guoko kūrauma na njaa. | Are we the ones talking back at each other or is there an outside hand? | Outside interference. | The speaker avoids being tribal by mentioning that other tribes are interfering with their affairs. Off record. |
| Auditor general arokīre Kiambu arauga ūrīa njui ciūrīte, ūrīa fertilizer ciūrīte. | The auditor general came to Kiambu and said that chicks and fertilizer had gotten lost. | They were stolen. | Indirect reference to stealing. The euphemism softens unpleasant truth. Off record. |
| Ateti tūtuikīte andū agūikanīria ciugo | As politicians, we have become people who are throwing words at each other. | Insulting one another. | Indirect reference made to avoid being offensive towards the people the speaker is referring to. Bald on record. |

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

From the data presentation, interpretation, and analyses of the above data collected, political euphemisms for this study can be grouped into 6 types as discussed below;

1. Use of pronoun euphemisms

This study's findings indicate that the use of pronouns is part of political euphemism. The speakers whose utterances were analyzed above used pronouns as euphemisms to save face. For example,

when CI says amekire ‘he’, the speaker avoids saying the name of the person they are talking about.

2. Avoid name-mentioning euphemisms

Some of the speakers whose utterances have been analyzed have employed these types of euphemisms. For example, when CC says andū aya ‘these people’, the speaker fails to mention the person they are talking about.

3. Avoidance Euphemisms

These types of euphemisms form the highest percentage of euphemisms used by the ten speakers. All the speakers have used at least one of these types of euphemisms. for example, guoko kūrauma na njaa ‘outside hand’, or when CI says mūka ūrīa Mweru ‘new wife’.

4. Positive politeness

This is also another type of euphemism that has emerged, although not widely used by the ten speakers. The terms under this type are sugar-coated. For example, when CH says ciathira kara, ‘when they become colorless’.

5. Off record

Other types of euphemisms have emerged from the study and are not widely used by all ten speakers in their utterances. For example, when CA says mūka wa X ‘x’s wife’, CH says kwaya ‘choir’. All these nicknames help them save face.

6. Use of superordinate

Some of the words identified as euphemisms were superordinate, terms representing larger groups. For example, the term kīrīma, ‘the mountain’, has been used to refer to people from the central region who speak Gikuyu as their first language. The speakers used kīrīma ‘mountain’ instead of saying agīkūyū, which may have been seen as tribal, and nyūmba īno ‘this house’, another superordinate representing people from the central region. Rūrīrī ‘community’ represents the agīkūyū speakers.

Conclusions

The findings are organized according to the three research objectives that guided this study. The primary objective was to analyze the use of Gikuyu euphemisms by politicians in Kiambu County, Kenya, as face-saving devices. This objective was achieved by examining 50 utterances from 10 county politicians. The results demonstrate that euphemisms are an integral feature of political discourse, helping leaders manage both the content and tone of their communications. Gikuyu political euphemisms identified in this study enabled politicians to regulate the amount and quality of information delivered to their audiences, and to employ a range of politeness strategies when addressing voters and political rivals indirectly. The analysis revealed that politicians frequently relied on euphemisms such as pronouns, friendly terms, avoidance of explicit naming, nicknames,

and superordinate terms. Interestingly, the findings also indicate that the audience often did not recognize the euphemistic language, instead interpreting the messages literally. While the electorate generally responded positively to political euphemisms, they were largely unaware of the underlying rhetorical strategies.

This study concludes that politicians employ euphemisms as an essential face-saving mechanism. The Gikuyu political euphemisms identified here have significantly shaped the electorate's perception and understanding of the political landscape. Consequently, euphemisms serve as both persuasive tools and, at times, instruments of manipulation or deception. It is also notable that politicians may unconsciously use euphemisms, indicating an ingrained reliance on such language in political communication. Furthermore, political euphemisms manifest in various forms—including pronouns, implicative expressions, friendly terms, name omissions, nicknames, and superordinate References, all of which contribute to nuanced and strategic political messaging.

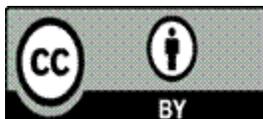
Recommendations

Regarding the third objective, the influence of euphemisms on the electorate, this study recommends raising public awareness of political euphemisms. Increased awareness will enable citizens to critically assess language that may be used to incite, deceive, or mislead, particularly during election campaigns. One effective strategy is to incorporate the study of political euphemisms into the educational curriculum for Junior and Senior Schools, especially within the History curriculum. Additionally, fostering public discourse on political euphemisms through print and electronic media can further promote civic understanding and electoral literacy.

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