



Examining Discoursal Strategies used in the Presidential Candidates' Manifestos in the 2022 General Election in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the discoursal strategies used in the campaign manifestos of the presidential candidates during the 2022 general election in Kenya. While campaign manifestos are critical strategies through which candidates articulate their visions to persuade the electorate, studies on Kenyan elections have rarely examined how these texts utilize language to construct ideology, identity, and authority. Data were drawn from the four presidential manifestos used in the 2022 general election and collected through content analysis and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The analysis was guided by the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines how language is used to enact, reproduce, and resist power abuse, dominance, and social inequality. A descriptive research design was applied to interpret the manifesto texts. The results revealed the prevalent use of the following discoursal strategies; multi-textual levels of persuasive discourse, deliberate word choices, metaphors, symbolism, and syntactic communicative units. These strategies were often deployed not only to construct political identities but also establish authority, critique opponents, and persuade voters. This study contributes to political discourse research by offering an in-depth account of how discoursal strategies function in Kenyan presidential manifestos and by demonstrating how CDA can uncover hidden dimensions of power, ideology, and voter manipulation in electoral communication.

Key words: Campaign; discoursal strategies; electorate; manifesto; political discourse

INTRODUCTION

Politicians typically employ a distinctive use of language that diverges from ordinary, everyday communication (Michira, 2014). These rhetorical features include specific lexical choices, grammatical structures, and symbolic elements. Through campaign manifestos, political actors articulate their agendas to the electorate with the primary objective of securing support. Given this, manifestos have become one of the tools used in political discourse to shape opinions of the political actors and the electorate. Klingeman et al., (1994), observe that political election manifestos are public declarations of political parties, in which they outline their policies and tell



electors how the country would be governed if they are given the mandate to assume office and wield power. Apart from articulation of policies, the drafting of manifestos often involves the use of appealing visuals, branding, and persuasive language designed to attract attention and resonate with readers (Thackrey & Toye, 2019). This indicates that language choices shape the message, its interpretation and action taken by the writer or the reader.

Previous studies on the persuasive function of manifestos (Edem, 2019; Barber, 1999; Van Dijk, 2003) highlight how style and linguistic strategies influence voter opinions through the effective use of style and linguistic choices. Likewise, Pennycook (2003) demonstrates that symbolic resources in manifestos serve rhetorical purposes, allowing politicians to establish power relations and evoke emotions such as fear, hope, and patriotism in order to mobilize support. Despite this recognition, there remains limited research focusing on how presidential candidates in Kenya deploy discursual strategies in their manifestos to negotiate ideology, construct identity, and persuade voters. Much of the existing scholarship emphasizes the general persuasive role of political manifestos but does not critically examine the interplay of specific discursual strategies within the Kenyan electoral context. This study therefore addresses this gap by analyzing the 2022 presidential manifestos through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping political communication, voter perceptions, and power relations in Kenya's democratic processes.

Discursual strategies in manifesto texts

Effective communication strategies play a central role in shaping how messages are presented, interpreted, and received by listeners or readers (Brownell, 2012; Mudogo, 2020). Within political discourse, communication is particularly significant because it centers on the articulation of ideologies and the persuasion of voters. To achieve these goals, politicians often rely on creative language use, making discursual strategies essential tools for enhancing message clarity and influencing the emotions of the audience. In this regard, Arlow (2024) emphasises that discursual strategies serve as mechanisms through which information is effectively conveyed, and persuasion in guiding audiences in their decision-making.

Several studies have been conducted in this perspective. For instance, Moloi and Bojabotseha (2014) examined the African National Congress (ANC) manifestos from the 1999, 2004, and 2009 national elections. Their analysis, which focused on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, revealed that the manifestos incorporated multiple voices and texts. These strategies were employed to reinforce the party's authority by highlighting both past achievements and future commitments aimed at improving the lives of South Africans. This study deviates, and analyzes discursual strategies employed in manifestos to present the political agenda and guide the voters on choices they make. Similarly, Bathlomeos (2016) conducted a stylistic and rhetorical analysis of the 2014 election manifestos of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and the Democratic Turnballe Alliance (DTA). The study found that both parties relied heavily on rhetorical and stylistic devices such as metonymy, symbolism, metaphor, repetition, foregrounding, collective memory, indirect promises, and personification. The deliberate use of



these strategies was intended to strengthen emotional appeal and secure the electorate's support. While the earlier studies emphasized intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and rhetorical devices, the current study foregrounds discursual strategies as central mechanisms through which presidential candidates package ideologies, frame political agendas, and attempt to persuade the electorate.

Another related study by Kondowe (2019) investigated the use of voice and voice projection technique in a political speech. The speech was highly authoritative, persuading, converging and highlighting. The study found out that a speaker uses voice projection to present his ideas on development to the people effectively, to be understood and influence the audience to vote for him. In the findings the speaker employed a number of voice projection strategies in his speech. While this study emphasizes on voice projection strategies like accommodation and authority strategies to discursively impose power to their readers and listeners through discourse, the current study examines discursual strategies and their role in shaping the message and converging and motivating the audience.

Reyes (2015) examined how linguistic variables are employed strategically in various instances of political communication to present different levels of intimacy in relation to a continuum between contextually and formality. The findings revealed the use of dominant linguistic variables such as choice of words, syntactic structures, semantic and pragmatic meanings, repetition, symbolism, and multi-textual levels of persuasion discourse and metaphors. While this study analyzes the linguistic variable as strategies that create intimacy between the political actors and the audience in political communication, the current study examines the linguistic variables as mechanisms that help shape the messages presented and opinions of voters, and thus significantly increase the voter turnout during voting.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted, focusing on linguistic units of analysis, specifically words, phrases, and sentences, drawn from the manifesto texts. These include multi-textual levels of persuasion discourse, choice of words, metaphors, symbolism and syntactic communicative units. From the four manifestos, 77 discursual strategies were extracted. This study used a sample of 23 which represents 30 % of the total symbol. Twelve respondents were purposively sampled through the snowballing method. The study is essentially a qualitative analysis. The data were subjected to textual analysis which is a research technique that involves close reading and interpretation of texts to understand their meaning, structure and the social and cultural contexts that shape them (Jockers, 2013). Textual analysis examines data to explore the meanings and interpretations of communication, such as the underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the content.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on the discursual strategies employed in the campaign manifestos of presidential candidates during Kenya's 2022 general election. The findings reveal several strategies that shaped how the manifestos were constructed to communicate



political ideas. These include multi-textual levels of persuasive discourse, strategic choice of words, the use of metaphors and symbolism, as well as the sentence as a communicative unit. Each of these strategies is discussed in detail below:

Multi-textual levels of persuasion discourse

Political actors use multi-textual levels of persuasion discourse to package political agenda of persuading the voters for support. Within this category, the analysis identified two key discursal strategies that candidates employed to strengthen their appeal: the deliberate use of local words from Swahili language to establish cultural resonance which enhances connection between the candidates and the voters, and secondly the deployment of emotional language reflected through deliberate use of emotionally charged words to present ideologies to the voters.

Use of local words

The analysis revealed that all the presidential candidates incorporated local words in their manifestos as a strategy to communicate their ideology to the targeted voters more effectively to the citizens. By embedding familiar linguistic elements, the candidates sought to establish cultural identification, foster reliability, and strengthen the connection between their political agendas and the electorate. This is illustrated from the manifesto texts.

Datum 1: RP MANF. *Tingiza Mti* (shake the trees)

In example 1 above, the candidate used the Swahili words *tingiza miti* (shake the trees) to express the promises initiating changes in all the key sectors of the economy such as health, education, agriculture and industrialization to improve the welfare of the citizens. This signifies a call for transformation and reform, while at the same time using familiar language that resonates with the citizens. Sarvat (2015, p. 376) argues that “a greater number of the participants in political texts are those group members whom the party politics attempts to influence by presenting before them a strong political agenda against the opponent”. This justifies the use of *tingiza miti* slogan by the candidate to portray himself as being better than the opponents.

Datum 2: KK MAF. *Kazi in Kazi* (each hustle counts)

In the example above the candidate uses the *kazi ni kazi*, (each hustle counts) to point out that each job is important as it earns an income. This was a wakeup call for the electorate that all work regardless of the nature is valuable as it earns an income. The candidate used the words familiar to the voters as a way of connecting with them. This is significant as it enhanced citizen participation in governance by helping in economic development (Alpha Nur et.al 2024).

Datum 3: KK MANF. *Mama mboga* (vegetable sellers), *boda boda* (motorcycle riders)

The candidate uses the Swahili phrases *mama mboga* and *boda boda* to refer to the local citizens and the position they hold in economic growth. This signifies the candidate's use of



local language to foster a sense of belonging for the local citizens who represent in order to gain the majority of the voters with an intention of gaining support. The use of local words in the manifestos helps create a relationship between the political actor and the voters, as the political actor wants the people to know that he is not a stranger, and that the voters should agree with him since the political actor understands them better therefore, a form of psychological affiliation (Ataa,2017).

Datum 4: ALM MANF. *Inawezekana* (it's possible)

The candidate used the Swahili word *inawezekana* as a point out the power relations exhibited by the candidate towards voters. This is evident how the candidate presents development projects to the citizens such as improved health care, job creation and infrastructure development with an aim to transform their lives. The word *inawezekana* was key in shaping the ideologies presented by the candidate thus, helping the candidate build his identity in society in the Kenyan political scene (Darwin and Evizariza,2024). This was used as a rhetorical strategy meant to persuade the voters that the ideology espoused by the political actor fulfils the needs and expectations of the voters.

Datum 5: AP MANF. *Badilisha Kabisa* (total change)

In example 5 above, the candidate uses the Swahili word *badilisha* to advocate for change in all the key sectors of the economy such as agriculture, trade, governance and education. The candidate uses the phrases *badilisha kabisa* to persuade the voters to see the need of initiating transformative projects that will meet the needs of the electorate. The local words are used to establish the theme and vision of the candidate to the electorate, and therefore boost their trust and accountability.

Emotive language

It involves the use of words and phrases with strong emotional connotations to evoke the feelings of the audience.

From the manifesto texts, instances of motive language included:

Datum 6: RP MANF. People found **guilty** of **corruption** and **stealing** public resources, will be sentenced to death by **hanging**.

Datum 7: AP MANF. *I bwana badilisha* (will **fix** the **nation**).

Datum 8. KK MANF. We will enable the **hustler** nation to realize its full potential and earn a good living from the government.

In example 6 above, the candidate uses the emotive words corruption and stealing to shape the electorate's perception on the message on societal decay. He uses the emotive words 'guilty' and 'hang' as a strategy to enlighten the voters of the punishment of the culprits as a word of caution. The candidate in the example 6 uses the words as a strategy to evoke a strong emotional response from the reader or listener.



In example 7 above, the candidate uses the emotive words ‘fix’ and ‘nation’ as a strategy to present his ideologies in a persuasive manner helps to point out to the citizens the need for need for transformative projects presented by the candidate that are intended to improve their welfare. The words help create a sense of urgency in the voters, and mobilize them to take action through swaying of their opinions to support the candidate’s thoughts (Ataa,2017).

In example 8 the candidate uses the emotive word ‘hustler’ to enhance to a stronger connection between him and the electorate. The word hustler refers to the common citizens who are energetic and are low income earners. The candidate uses the words to show understanding of the problems the electorate face thus, create a sense of shared experience. By building the trust of the voters in the candidate’s ability to improve their standards of living through the initiation and implementation of development projects

Choice of words

The data extraction tool, was used to collect data on personal pronouns, modal auxiliary verbs and adverbs as used in the manifestos of the presidential candidates.

Personal pronouns

Datum 9: AP MAF: I bring an end to the systematic meddling and strangulation of teachers’ unions by the government.

Datum10.: KK MANF. We must make difficult decisions to pause developments in some regions which have clearly been enjoying the national cake for a longer time than others so that **we** can focus on others for the good of all Kenyans.

Biber et al. (1999) maintain that personal pronouns are function words which make it possible to succinctly refer to the speaker or writer, the addressee, and identifiable things or persons other than the speaker or writer and the addressee. From example 9 above, the candidate uses the personal pronoun ‘I’ to show that it is his sole responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the education sector by curbing interference. The pronoun ‘I’ points out the notion of ‘exclusivity’. The pronoun ‘I’ is used to express personal opinions thus, promoting individuality (Beard, 2000).

The candidate in example 10 above uses the pronoun ‘we’ to bring out the idea of collective responsibility to ensure equitable development in all areas of the country by developing the underdeveloped areas. According to Beard (2000), politicians use the inclusive pronoun, ‘we’, when they want to share responsibility and associate with their followers. The pronoun ‘we’ is to indicate that it is a collective responsibility of the candidates and the voters to work together to improve their welfare. It is a strategy that mobilizes the voters for collective action.

Adverbs

A number of adverbs were employed by the candidate in the manifestos to express their messages, and denote the time when the actions will be performed and the manner in which this is done. According to Matthews (2007), an adverb is a word that modifies anything other



than a noun. This means that adverbs can serve as modifiers of verbs. As discursial strategies, adverbs are used to convey the writer's attitude towards the message, to evaluate the information and guides the reader's interpretation which shapes the opinions and action taken. The candidates use the following adverbs in their manifesto texts;

Datum 11: KK MANF. It is our vision to reduce the occurrence of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, cancer, gout and arthritis by 40% by year 2027.

Adverbs of time are used to point out times when actions are performed like past, future and present (Amanda & Lilia, 2021). The adverbs of time in example 11 points out the candidates' opinion on the time frame when the proposed projects will be completed for instance: the candidate hopes to reduce the occurrence of lifestyle diseases among the citizens by the year 2027. The use of adverbs of time is also a persuasive strategy meant to appeal to the voter's emotion, and build their hope of experiencing changes in the future since the elections were held in 2022.

Datum 12. AP MANF. Limit total loan repayments by government to Ksh trillion. This will **immediately** release Ksh 350B to support government programs.

Adverbs of manner demonstrate the manner in which the actions would be performed. This is a key strategy as it contributes to the voicing of the candidate's interpretation of the intended meaning by adding details and depth to the message to achieve clarity. The candidate in the AP manifesto uses the adverb of manner 'immediately' to impact on the reader's interpretation of the urgency in delivering on clearing the loan and releasing more money to fund governments projects. The use of adverbs plays a role in evoking the emotions of the readers through the effect of the rhetoric on the readers thus, enhance the persuasive power of the manifestos.

Modal auxiliary adverbs

The data collected reveals the use of the modal auxiliary verbs: shall, will, should, must, can and could. Nartey and Yankson (2014) argue that modals are deployed in manifestos to indicate a sense of intention, promise, obligation and necessity in a conscious and strategic attempt to persuade the electorate.

Datum 13: KK MANF. Custodians of power must be accountable for the mandate bestowed upon them by the electorate.

Newson 2008) argues that 'must' is used in the manifesto to express (strong) obligation and/or compulsion and logical necessity. In this example, the modal must be used to point out the obligation of the candidate in ensuring that leaders are accountable to the voters in their use of powers.

Datum 14: KK MANF. It is integral to our philosophy as Hustler Nation that all Kenyans **should** have access s to the eating opportunities the dynastic regimes have always enjoyed with their families and friends.



Nartey and Yankson (2014) points out that the modal ‘should’ is obligatory thus, expressing a desire strongly. In example 14 above, the modal ‘should’ expresses the fact that it is obligation of the candidate to ensure all the citizens access wealth creation opportunities. The candidate uses the modal ‘should’ to win the trust of hustlers by assuring them that he would ensure that wealth creation is devolved from the rich to the common citizens.

Datum 15: KK MANF. The water conditions have led to a distinctive divide between the rich who **can** afford to buy their way out of the problems and the poor hustlers who are forced to compromise their health in order to balance daily needs.

The modal ‘can’ is used to express a theoretical possibility, in which case it gives a strong possibility for an event to materialize and/or be actualize (Nartey and Yankson (2014)). The candidate uses the modal can to point out the actualization of a social divide among the citizens of Kenya in the accessibility of medical care, as the rich easily access it due to availability of resources as compared to the poor who are denied the access due to unavailability of funds.

Datum 16: AP MANF. My government **will** guarantee free education at all levels including significant tax breaks for firms that take fresh graduates for attachment and eventually employing them.

The modal ‘will’ is used in the above example to express future intentions for the citizens of Kenya as evident from the presentation of ideologies. According to Newson (2008), the modal ‘will’ is used in the manifesto to express strong intentions, certainty, determination and promises. The presidential candidates use will to reinforce the exact objectives to the citizens. In the above example ‘will’ is used to point out the intentions of the candidate in ensuring accessibility of education by children of Kenya by funding it and ensure accessibility of employment opportunities.

Metaphors

Charteris-Black (2011) opines that politicians use metaphors to paint their view of issues in relation to politics. Consequently, politicians attack their rivals to portray a positive image of themselves.

A number of metaphors are used in the manifesto texts by the candidates in the manifesto texts.

Datum 17: KK MANF. Shaking up Kenya through bottom-up economy.

The metaphor ‘Bottom-up’ is used by the candidate to refer to inverting the pyramid which places the rich at the top and the poor at the bottom. The candidate in KK manifesto, to reflect the systematic problems that have resulted in high poverty levels and promises to make the poor access wealth creating opportunities. This was a strategy to evoke the emotions of the masses who are at the bottom therefore giving them a voice in the governance an economic development.



Datum 18: AP MANF. Kenyans have been promised mountains of money.

This metaphor conveys the idea of large amounts of financial resources or wealth. The candidate used the metaphor to create a picture of accumulation of much wealth which represents high amounts of wealth or financial success thus, will improve their welfare.

Datum 19: AP MANF. The rotten potatoes in the tax collection cost a nation an upward of 200 billion shillings per year.

The metaphor rotten potatoes refer to something that is harmful. The candidate uses this metaphor to reflect the systematic problems caused by the agencies assigned to collect tax which has resulted in underfunding of development projects and slow economic growth.

Datum 20: KK MANF. Shaking up the bottom-up economy.

The metaphor bottom-up economy as used in the KK manifesto text to refer to the radical changes to the initiated by the candidate by ensure those at the bottom of the pyramid, represented by the poor, through the creation of opportunities to build wealth as enjoyed by the dynasties represented by the rich and those in power

The metaphors are used to enhance the framing of the ideologies presented thus, influencing the interpretation of the messages by the voters. The metaphors are also used as a persuasive strategy to evoke the emotions of voters and shape their attitudes towards the candidate as one to bring the desired change. Speakers who use metaphors are considered more convincing than those who use literal language (Dillard ,2002)

Symbolism

Symbolism is used by writers with an intention to create enable a reader create mental pictures of the message which enhances understanding. A number of symbols were used by the presidential candidates in the 2022 general election in Kenya to emphasize messages presented to the voters.

Datum 21: KK MANF. Dynasties

This a symbol for the rich and are seen as powerful and wealthy controlling the key sectors of economy at the expense of the hustlers represent the energetic but poor whose toil and contribute to the wealth they hardly enjoy.

Datum 22: KK MANF. *mama mboga* (vegetable seller) and *watu wa boda boda* (motorcycle riders)

These symbols represent the low class citizens who represent the informal sector which has been neglected though it contributes much to economic growth.

Data 23: AP MANF. The symbol black money

The symbol 'black money' represents the funds that are realized through illicit means such as corruption activities, illegal trade or evading payment of tax. This also symbolizes moral decay in the society which is a source of inequality.



The symbols as discorsal strategies are key in the interpretation of the messages as they help create vivid picture of the writer's opinions and choices made of what the speaker is talking about and this helps shape their opinions and choices made. The use of symbolism enhances the interpretation of the text, as they convey deeper meanings of the themes in the manifestos, and hence facilitate clarity of the message (Adebayo, 2024). The symbols play a key role in evoking the emotions of the voters in persuading them to support the candidate.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the discorsal strategies employed in the campaign manifestos of the presidential candidates during Kenya's 2022 general election. Beyond identifying the strategies, the study underscores their significance in shaping political messaging and influencing voter perceptions. The analysis demonstrates that language is not merely a vehicle for communication but a carefully deployed resource that allows political actors to manipulate, frame, and amplify information in ways that resonate with the electorate. The strategic use of discorsal strategies indicate how manifestos serve more than policy documents; they are persuasive instruments that construct ideologies, reinforce authority, and cultivate emotional connections with voters. By weaving themes such as agriculture, health, trade, and education into rhetorically crafted texts, candidates position themselves as credible and relatable leaders, while simultaneously mobilizing support. The findings affirm that the power of manifestos lies in their ability to combine clarity with persuasion, enabling politicians to establish rapport, project authority, and evoke emotions that motivate voter action. This study therefore highlights the centrality of discorsal strategies in political communication, showing that the effectiveness of a manifesto is less about the policies presented and more about how language is strategically used to package, legitimize, and sell those policies to the public.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



Authors' Contributions.

Christine Angachi conceptualized the study, prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, and compiled the data. Benard Mudogo and Reginald Atichi offered guidance in data analysis and interpretation. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take responsibility for its content and similarity index.

Availability of data and materials.

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