

UNPACKING MODIFIED IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN KENYAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Political discourse employs colorful expressions to establish strong relationships with the audience. Speakers or writers exploit the relationship between human language and socio-political experiences to initiate creative discourses through modification of expressions. Against this background, this study sets out to investigate the meaning of modified idiomatic expressions in Kenyan political discourse. The study has two objectives: to describe the structural and lexical modification of idiomatic expressions and to interpret the modified forms using vital relations. The study employs descriptive research design. The study randomly sampled ten idioms used during the 2017 General Elections and used content analysis to establish the lexical and structural relationships between the canonical and modified expressions. The idioms were analyzed using the Conceptual Integration Theory to preserve the link between two expressions and account for the emergent meaning. The study found that Kenyan political discourse achieves figurative competencies through modified idioms. Interpretation of modified idioms requires a thorough understanding of vital relations and pragmatic inferences. Further, Cognitive Linguistics establishes backstage cognition and supplies the elements omitted by grammar. The study concludes that modified idiomatic expressions achieve contextual significance. Consumers of modified idiomatic expressions should immerse themselves in the socio-political backgrounds to unmask the emergent meaning.*

Keywords: *modified idioms, vital relations, political discourse, Conceptual Integration Theory, Cognitive Linguistics*

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Introduction

Language is a potent tool of communicating a person's ideas and shaping the attitude of readers or listeners. Whoever uses language authoritatively and applies expressions in fresh contexts commands a large number of followers. According to Ogal, Gathigia and Maitaria (2019), creativity in the use of language keeps an audience glued to a speech or written text. In order to initiate a sustainable relationship through language, speakers often exploit socio-political experiences to create utterances that operate above grammatical functions. This is the opinion buttressed by Vrbinč and Vrbinč (2011) who point out that creative modifications of expressions may be made by writers or speakers to "achieve a particular effect" (p. 75). To appreciate creative language, a reader or listener needs both stylistic potential and linguistic competence to decode variant expressions within a communicative context. Therefore, consuming creatively modified expressions without perceptual tools of cognition robs an individual of the full capacity to decipher new meanings.

Idiomatic expressions have fixed meanings and they are used to embellish communication. Holsinger (2013) undertakes a study on contextual application of idioms and observes that idiomatic expressions perform a decorative value in any text. It is for this reason that many writers and speakers sprinkle idioms on their language for communicative competencies. A study by Džanić (2013) indicates that although an idiom itself is creative, users often resort to modifications to achieve novelty of meaning in fresh settings. A reader, therefore, needs to engage in imaginative processes to unpack the modified idioms in fresh contexts. It is important to mention that idioms have fixed collocations and meanings assigned by their communities of origin. As Džanić (2013) argues, a decision to modify idioms is intentional and this step yields special meaning. This deliberate modification requires special cognitive apparatus that the aspects of grammar cannot provide.

The term "idiom" refers to an expression whose meaning cannot be directly deduced from its constituents. The meaning of an idiomatic expression is assigned by the particular community that has created it. According to Džanić (2007), idiomatic expressions have universally accepted meanings. Therefore, any modification of a canonical expression results in special meanings which require a thorough scrutiny of the socio-cultural setting of the modified idiom. Coulson and Oakley (2005) postulate that language involves thought and action and that the interpretation of abstract concepts such as modified idioms requires an in-depth analysis of the background of the utterance. Generally, an idiom, whether in its original form or modified, paints abstract imagery in the mind of the audience. This means that idiomatic expressions are classified with other ways of achieving abstract imagery such as metaphor, analogy, counterfactual reasoning, and metonymy. Fauconnier and Turner (2008) point out that formal

branches of linguistics (morphology, phonology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics) fall short of the capacity to explain the meaning of abstract imagery. Further, Fauconnier and Turner (2008) observe that cognitive interpretation is the best approach for decoding idiomatic expressions.

The motivation for using idiomatic expressions in speech or written texts has received a lot of scholarly attention from linguists. Generally, research on this topic proves that idioms make communication colorful and fascinating. This is the point buttressed by Liontas (2017) who perceptibly acknowledges that idioms are not only colorful but they also imprint a lasting image in the minds of the audience. It is interesting to note that whoever uses idioms in discourse achieves metaphoric reference which allows them to operate above normal sentential constructions. According to Ogal, Gathigia and Maitaria (2019, p. 22), audiences are particularly drawn to the figurativeness of idiomatic texts because such discourses “take listeners above literal meaning.” A compelling phenomenon in communication is the deliberate flouting of the original structures of idioms with the aim of creating local understanding and special meaning. In a study exploring the role of abstract imagery in reinforcing audience’s thoughts, Sauciuc (2009) observes that competent users of idiomatic expressions shift to new figurative competencies by modifying idiomatic expressions. The results of such figurative shift are novel meanings that ordinary provisions of grammar cannot decode.

Political discourses apply idiomatic expressions in either original or modified forms to carve a peculiar niche in communication. Kreiss (2016) reiterates that political discourse seizes the moment by sprinkling idioms on language to communicate multidimensional messages to the readers or listeners. On such occasions, idiom use triggers the audience’s cognitive apparatus to unpack the intended meaning. For purposes of local understanding, political discourse applies modified expressions to make a special appeal to supporters or followers in specific contexts. Nyairo and Ogude (2005) undertake a study on formulaic language and idiomatic expressions in Kenya and observe that one needs to immerse themselves in the social, political, economic and geographical contexts of emergent expressions. From the study by Nyairo and Ogude (2005), backstage cognition comes out as a powerful tool for interpreting modified idiomatic expressions in political discourse.

Modification of idioms brightens up communication and triggers the audience to pursue meaning beyond literal expressions. It is important to mention that political discourse expands the frame of reference by engaging readers’ minds in new expressions that communicate contextually. According to Gurney (2014), any intentional modification of idioms in political discourse should not be overlooked. Instead, rigorous efforts should be devoted to the interpretation of the text through cognitive lenses. Although creative idiom use achieves the

purpose of communication, it is necessary to investigate the mechanisms that sustain allurements to political discourses. Gurney (2014) believes that audiences appreciate exciting discourses if they can relate to the user's choice of words. Impressive language that flouts canonical forms utilizes cognitive principles for their effectiveness. Against this backdrop, the present study sets out to interpret modified idiomatic expressions in Kenyan political discourse using a Cognitive Linguistics perspective.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i) What are the structural and lexical modifications of idiomatic expressions in the Kenyan political discourse?
- ii) What are the vital relations between canonical and modified idiomatic expressions in Kenyan political discourse?
- iii) How does the Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) account for the meaning of modified idiomatic expressions in Kenyan political discourse?

Theoretical Framework

The theory which guided the present study is Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT). This theory was developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) and improved by Coulson and Oakley (2005). Generally, the CIT provides a framework for conceptualizing the world around us. Also known as Blending Theory, the CIT handles both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of communication by creating connections between language and how people comprehend concepts in particular contexts. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) observe that the CIT examines thought production, transfer and the establishment of meaning in different settings. To process the meaning of both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena, the theory uses mental spaces to establish connections "between our understanding of language and the way we comprehend human thought and activity in general" (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p.8). The relationship between original expressions and modified items is processed through cognitive domains referred to as conceptual integration networks.

Conceptual Integration Network helps the CIT to process meaning by establishing four mental spaces. These spaces include two input spaces, the emergent structure and the blended space (Omazić, 2003). The four-space network allows one to retrieve information stored in the mind and relate it to new contexts hence establishing new interpretations (Džanić, 2007). One important aspect of the CIT that enables it to interpret new expressions is a vital relation. A vital relation refers to the link between an original expression and the blended or modified one. According to Džanić (2007) decoding modified expressions

requires a thorough understanding of vital relations such as intentionality, identity, space, time, change, cause-effect, uniqueness, analogy, representation, similarity, part-whole, category, dysanology, role, and property. Apart from vital relations, the CIT uses processes such as composition, completion and elaboration. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) summarize the conceptual integration network as shown in the diagram below:

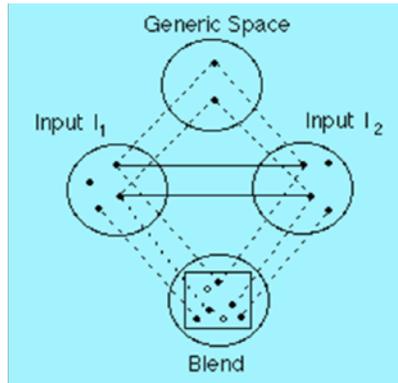


Fig. 1. *Input Spaces*

To analyze a blended or modified expression using the CIT, one goes through three basic steps. First, a hypothetical blend or modified expression is introduced. Second, one describes the conceptual structure of the four spaces to establish a complete conceptual network. The process of describing the mental spaces involves the establishment of mappings or relationships among the mental spaces (Džanić, 2007). The third step involves the description of the blended space. In this process, one pays special attention to the information emanating from each mental space. Consequently, the preserved links from each space allow novel meanings to pop out automatically.

Methodology

This study was guided by a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design seeks to systematically describe research phenomena without manipulating the data. According to Hashemi and Babaii (2013), descriptive research design lends itself easily to qualitative studies because it allows researchers to survey and observe phenomena without interfering with any variable. Further, a descriptive research design was chosen for the present study because it integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. The opinion of Hashemi and Babaii (2013) is buttressed by Rahi (2017) who mentions that “descriptive research seeks to observe and document an occurring phenomenon which cannot be ascribed an objective value” (p. 2). Bearing in mind that descriptive research design seeks to obtain information regarding the current state of particular phenomena in specific contexts (Rahi,

2017), the study purposively sampled ten (10) modified idiomatic expressions used during the Kenyan general electioneering period in 2017. The sampled idiomatic expressions were collected from newspapers published between May and October when official campaigns were conducted throughout the country.

The ten modified idiomatic expressions of political discourse were sampled from two major Kenyan newspapers: *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. These two newspapers were sampled because they constitute about 60% of national readership. According to Chege (2018), the *Daily Nation* commands a nationwide readership of 40% while *The Standard* is read by 20%. Nyabuga and Booker (2013) conduct a study on the readership of Kenyan newspapers and observe that electioneering periods register heightened interest in readers because of political heat in the country. Although there are other Kenyan newspapers such as *The Star*, *The People Daily*, *Taiifa Leo*, *Business Daily Africa*, and others, the present study limited itself to the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* because these two command a large market share and have a stable readership.

Purposive sampling was employed in this study for certain reasons. First, purposive sampling allows a researcher to make generalizations about entire samples because each selected item has desirable characteristics. According to Acharya, Prakash, Saxena and Nigam (2013), purposive sampling is a convenient procedure since it targets respondents who “are at the right place at the right time” (p. 332). Second, the paper used purposive sampling because it has a low margin of error. Acharya et al. (2013) reiterate that purposive sampling undertakes random survey of research items and draws significant conclusions with minimal error margins. Before conducting purposive sampling, this study carried out a pre-research survey to determine whether Kenyan newspapers used modified or blended idiomatic expressions during political campaigns. After the survey, the study sampled ten blended idiomatic expressions and sought to explain their meanings using a Cognitive Linguistics approach.

After coming up with a sample of ten (10) blended idiomatic expressions, the two researchers in this study engaged two other annotators for analysis. The annotators were trained on the tenets of the Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT). The study then used a discussion schedule in which the annotators identified the type of modification, established vital relations, and constructed mental spaces to allow new meanings to pop out automatically. The discussion schedule was guided by the background of each modified idiom. Further, the annotators used inter-rater reliability measures by allocating 0.25 points for unanimity on type of modification, vital relations and emergent meanings.

Findings and Discussions

The study found out that Kenyan political discourse highly uses modified idiomatic expressions to create novel meanings and appeal to audiences

creatively. The background of each of the 10 sampled idioms reveals that modification or blending is an intentional process. The table below presents the sampled idiomatic expressions:

Table 1. Modified Idiomatic Expressions in Kenyan Newspapers

Canonical Form	Modified Form	Type of Modification	Vital Relation	Reliability Measures				
				Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3	Coder 4	Total
Two horse race	Camel and ostrich race	Substitution	Category	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Lock horns	Lock jiggered mouths and heads	Substitution and addition	Category	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Awkward squad	Squad of kleptocratic redoubts	Reconstruction	Intentionality	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Fight fire with fire	Attack fire with cheap beer	Substitution and addition	Dysanalogy	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Battle of nerves	War of tomfoolery and kite flying lingo	Reconstruction	Representation	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Drop one's guard	Be a guard of nothing burger	Reconstruction	Cause-effect	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Long arm of the law	Wrong arm of the law	Substitution	Property	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Beat someone at their own game	Dissolve their own equations	Reconstruction	Dysanalogy	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Quick on the trigger	Fast to pull the "mbus"	Reconstruction	Dysanalogy	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00
Caught between the devil and the sea	Trapped between demons and rocks	Substitution	Category	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.00

Structural and Lexical Modification

From the sampled idiomatic expressions, the study found out that structural and lexical modification play an important role in achieving novel meanings. Structural or lexical modifications involve adjustment of the word order or replacement of the words that constitute the original or canonical idiomatic form (Džanić, 2007). The study established the following structural and lexical modifications of idiomatic expressions in Kenyan newspapers.

• Substitution

The study found three (3) idioms whose canonical forms are substituted to communicate special meaning. It also emerged from the study that substitution of one or more constituents of an idiom involves semantic relationships such as synonymy, hyponymy, paronymy, and antonymy among others. In some instances, however, substitutes may be semantically unrelated. Substitution involves replacement of one or more lexical items with other words as shown in the cases below:

- a) *Two horse race-* "Camel and ostrich race"
- b) *Long arm of the law-* "Wrong arm of the law"
- c) *Caught between the devil and the sea* "Trapped between demons and rocks"

In item (a) above, two horses have been replaced with two animals “camel and ostrich”. The relationship between the original idiom and the modified one is that of hyponymy. Horses, ostriches and camels can be broadly categorized as animals. The substitution is, therefore, homonymous. In item (b), the words “long” and “wrong” are semantically unrelated. However, by deliberately replacing the phoneme /l/ with /r/, the new idiom makes a totally different meaning from the original one. Item (c) has replaced the words “caught”, “devil” and “sea” with “trapped”, and “rocks”.

- Substitution and Addition

Under this category, the study identified two (2) modified idioms which have applied substitution and addition to communicate special meaning as shown below:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| d) <i>Lock horns-</i> | “Lock jiggered mouths and heads” |
| e) <i>Fight fire with fire</i> | “Attack fire with cheap beer” |

A close analysis of item (d) shows that the words “horns”, “mouths” and “heads” are parts of the body. They are, therefore, homonymous. However, it is interesting to note that the idiom “lock horns” consists of only two words. The modified form has added the word “jiggered” to the phrase “mouths and heads”. Therefore, this is a mixed type of modification because it involves both substitution and addition. In item (e), “fire” has been substituted with “beer”. However, the word ‘beer’ has been pre-modified by the adjective ‘cheap’

- Reconstruction

The study identified five (5) idiomatic expressions that have been reconstructed in varied communication contexts. Reconstruction is a type of lexical modification which involves total structural change of the original phraseological unit. The study found out that although reconstructed idioms share lexical compositions with the original forms, they are quite different in structure. The five reconstructed idioms are discussed below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| f) <i>Awkward squad</i> | “Squad of kleptocratic redoubts” |
| g) <i>Battle of nerves</i> | “War of tomfoolery and kite flying lingo” |
| h) <i>Drop one’s guard</i> | “Be a guard of nothing burger” |
| i) <i>Beat someone at their own game</i> | “Dissolve their own equations” |
| j) <i>Quick on the trigger</i> | “Fast to pull the <i>mbus</i> ” |

Idiom (f) is a multiword expression. However, the modified form has only retained the word “squad” and added three other terms to communicate a new meaning. Collected from the *Daily Nation* newspaper dated 9th May 2017, the modified expression “squad of kleptocratic redoubts” conjures images

of mismanagement by the government. It is for this reason that the terms “kleptocratic redoubts” are introduced. Idiom (g) is equally made up of two words. The modified form has substituted “battle” with “war” and replaced “nerves” with the phrase “tomfoolery and kite flying lingo”. Based on the context, it emerged that the battle shifts from nerves to language as denoted by the phrase “kite flying lingo”. This idiom has undergone a total structural change. It is, therefore, reconstructed. In item (h), (i) and (j), the idioms have undergone total structural changes by introducing new terms to the original form. Item (j) has further introduced the word “mbus” (prenasalized form of the word bus to communicate a special meaning.

Vital Relations and the Meaning of Modified Idiomatic Expressions

The second objective of this study was to investigate the meaning of modified idiomatic expressions using the vital relations that have been identified. The study established that a system of conceptual compression and interacting principles influence the creation and interpretation of blended meaning of idiomatic expressions. The ten (10) sampled idiomatic expressions indicated instances of vital relations as shown in the graph below:

Distribution of Vital Relations Across Modified Idioms

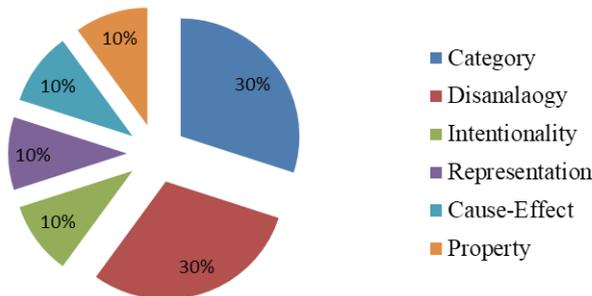


Fig. 2. *Distribution of Vital Relations across Modified Idioms*

- **Category**

As a vital relation, category refers to a relationship based on membership to general groups and classes into which two items can be broadly classified. In other words, an original idiom and modified expression may relate in such a manner that the lexical items are members of broad groups with distinct features. The instances below were classified as category.

i) Lock horns - “Lock jiggered mouths and heads”

Idiom (i) has used lexical items such as “horns”, “mouths”, and “heads”. A close analysis of these terms shows that they are parts of the body. The lexical items are, therefore, related by the vital relation of category because they represent

various parts of the body. The idiom “lock horns” means to engage in a tussle where weapons or verbal attacks may be used. Collected from *The Standard* newspaper dated 18th May 2017, this instantiation featured the Nairobi County Gubernatorial aspirant Miguna Miguna who exuded confidence in clinching the seat against his political rival Peter Kenneth. Based on the context, the idiom “lock horns” has been modified to *lock jiggered mouths* to evoke special meaning.

Horns and mouths are parts of the body with different functions. An animal uses a horn to attack an enemy. Similarly, a person uses the mouth to instigate verbal altercations. Just like one lifts, tosses, and tears an enemy using horns, the mouth is used to befoul one’s reputation. Also, horns are only effective if they are pointed. Turning to the context, it emerged that Miguna uses grandiose language to launch scathing attacks on anyone who does not subscribe to his political ideologies. This is in sharp contrast with Peter Kenneth who maintains a cool demeanor using measured expressions. The idea of jiggers plays a crucial role in the interpretation of the idiom *lock jiggered mouths*. Peter Kenneth served as the Member of Parliament for Gatanga Constituency between 2008 and 2012. During his term, his constituency was plagued with jiggers. Based on this misfortune, Miguna views Kenneth as a failed politician.

Jiggers are characterized by deep burrowing and unsightly infections. It is embarrassing to be infected with jiggers because these parasites paint a picture of poor hygiene and poverty. An organ infested with jiggers is abhorrent due to the ugly egg sacks with hollow spaces. To describe Peter Kenneth as an individual with *jiggered mouth and head* implies that his brain and mouth are defaced and unfit for political discourse. Whereas a horn is a potent tool used by a valiant soldier, a *jiggered mouth* is a crippled weapon in political battles. The annotators in this study established the meaning of the idiom *lock jiggered mouths* to be *a face-off between a brainy individual and a mentally crippled politician*.

ii) *Two horse race* -

“Camel and ostrich race”

The modified expression “Camel and ostrich race” relates to the canonical idiom *two horse race* through category. The words “camel” and “horse” are broadly classified as animals. By substituting “horse” with “camel and ostrich”, the idiom uses the vital relation of category. The idiom *two horse race* means a contest or competition between two parties with a chance of winning. The modified idiom has substituted “horses” with a “camel” and an “ostrich” for special reasons. The idiom was collected from the *Daily Nation* newspaper dated 28th May 2017. The context indicates the clearance of presidential aspirants such as Abduba Dida of Alliance for Real Change Party, Dr. Ekuru Aukot of Thirdway Alliance, and Joe Nyaga who contested on an independent ticket. The horse refers to seasoned politicians who expressed their presidential bid. However, Nyaga and

Aukot referred to themselves as camel and ostrich respectively. This yielded the idiom “camel and ostrich race.”

A horse is a fast animal that soldiers use during military conquests or wars. An ostrich is a bird with an impressive agility. A study by Daley, Channon, Nolan, and Hall (2016) indicates that the “gait dynamics of ostriches” make them streamlined and perhaps faster than even horses. A camel makes short sprints and may not endure long distances in any race. Joe Nyaga refers to himself as an ostrich because this is what his name signifies in Kiambu language. The image of an ostrich conjures notions of overconfidence and experience bearing in mind that Nyaga is more experienced in politics than Ekuru Aukot. The context suggests that the presidential race has no place for an inexperienced aspirant like Abduba Dida. Therefore, a “camel and ostrich race” limits itself to a contest between Nyaga and Aukot. Based on the political experiences of the two aspirants, the study established that a “camel and ostrich race” means *a contest between an overconfident legislator and a novice contestant*.

iii) Caught between the devil and the sea “Trapped between demons and rocks”

The instantiation in (ii) above is classified as a vital relation of category because of the relationship between sea and rocks. Generally, a sea is an expanse of water on the surface of the earth. A rock is defined as an expanse of hard material on the surface of the earth. Both the sea and rocks therefore, fall under the vital relation of category. The idiom *caught between the devil and the sea* means to be faced with two equally unpleasant situations from which one has to make a choice. The blended form “trapped between demons and rocks” was collected from a section of the newspaper where rioters made the lives of police officers miserable. The study established that although the word “sea” in the original idiom denotes a difficult situation, it is navigable. The blended idiom was collected from a section that described unruly protestors in Kisumu County. These rioters dared the police with slings, rocks, and stones. It is interesting to note that police had no facemasks when they lobbed teargas canisters on the protestors. Further, the protestors would sneak from the hideouts and hurl huge stones on the officers. Instead of the teargas affecting the protestors, it ended up irritating the police. The idiom “trapped between demons and rocks” denotes desperate police who wheeze, choke, and cough as they receive blow after blow from stones. Therefore, the annotators established that the idiom “trapped between demons and rocks” means to *receive the wrath of one’s punitive measures in addition to the enemy’s savage attacks*.

• **Disanalogy**

The vital relation of disanalogy expresses the relationship “between two things that are completely different” (Džanić, 2007, p. 176). In other words, the lexical items that make up the canonical form and the blended idiomatic expression are

unrelated. The study identified three (3) instances of disanalogy as discussed below.

iv) *Fight fire with fire* “Attack fire with cheap beer”

Fire in the original idiom implies shooting a gun or releasing a bullet to kill an enemy. In the context of the blended idiom, beer refers to an alcoholic drink used by revelers. An analysis of war and merry-making contexts shows that fire and beer are disanalogous. To interpret the meaning of “attack fire with cheap beer”, the annotators immersed themselves in the context of its usage. First, the idiom was collected from the *Daily Nation* dated 23rd June 2017. It featured the presidential hopeful Raila Odinga seeking to legalize chang’aa (local brew) as part of his manifesto. Raila’s justification for this recommendation was that the fight against local brew had become futile and there was need to break loose from the anti-alcohol campaigns and legalize the drink.

The annotators conducted a comparative analysis of beer and fire to come up with the special meaning of the blended idiom. First, fire is hot while beer is often served cold. Second, fire has no smell while beer is characterized by a strong smell. Third, whereas fire consumes a whole substance, beer gives a short-lived gratification and leads to memory loss and blackouts. Also, fire is entrusted to self-controlled and sober fighters while beer is consumed by irrational and rash individuals. Further, fire vigorously initiates actions while beer deactivates the brain and makes revelers disorderly. Considering the gravity of the presidential seat in Kenya, it emerged that “attack fire with cheap beer” means *to apply ludicrous and irrational strategies in a severe warfare*.

v) *Beat someone at their own game* “Dissolve their own equations”

The reconstructed idiom “dissolve their own equations” consists of lexical items that do not relate to the words contained in the original idiom. The study classified the idiom under the vital relation of disanalogy. Collected from the *Daily Nation* newspaper dated 16th May 2017, the idiom features four women contesting for the position of County Woman Representative in Isiolo County, Kenya. Tiyah Galgalo, the incumbent Woman Representative, is described as a proud aspirant who boasts of her stable political and professional connections. The idiom “beat someone at their own game” means to use one’s techniques to outshine them in a battle. The modification of this idiom requires contextual investigation.

The overconfidence and pride of Tiyah Galgalo parallels the attitude of the other aspirants such as Rehema Dida and Betsy Kaari who brag about their seasoned experience and firm connections. However, their political rival Nasibo Abdirahaman, the youngest contestant, promises to “dissolve their equations”. The article by Jebet (2017) implies certain aspects that can be used to distinguish between gamers and equation dissolvers. First, in political matters, gamers are

veteran lawmakers whose confidence lies in alliances while equation dissolvers are novices who only trust on the will of the majority. Second, political gamers are known for making unrealistic promises while equation dissolvers formulate achievable manifestos. Also, gamers are proud of their head start in politics while equation dissolvers are fresh entrants who use humility as the only tool to appeal to the masses. Finally, gamers master the art of name dropping while equation dissolvers are lone rangers with no name to cling to. With all these considerations, the annotators found that Nasibo Abdirahaman seeks to clinch the seat by dissociating herself from proud individuals. Therefore, the meaning of “dissolve their own equations” is to *appeal to voters through sincerity and humility*.

vi) *Quick on the trigger*

“Fast to pull the *mbus*”

The meaning of the idiom *quick on the trigger* is to be eager to fire at a person. The idiom implies that one is often ready to attack an enemy using readily available weapons. Used in a political context, the idiom *quick on the trigger* describes the intentions of a lawmaker who is ready to launch an attack on their opponents. The modified form “fast to pull the *mbus*” features the political sentiments of Kiraitu Murungi who has served as a Member of Parliament for many years. Collected from *The Standard* newspaper, the background of the idiom “fast to pull the *mbus*” highlights how Kiraitu Murungi has passionately supported the manifestos of previous governments in Kenya. The article particularly points out how Kiraitu has been instrumental in President Daniel Moi and Mwai Kibaki’s regimes. It emerges that Kiraitu Murungi was one of the kingpins during the merger between The National Alliance (TNA) and United Republican Party (URP). It is ironic to mention that Kiraitu terms Jubilee Party a political bastard, yet he zealously helped in its formation. The resolute support he once gave to the government is apparently fading and instead of shooting at the enemy, he pulls the “*mbus*” (bus) backwards. It is at the point of expressing buyer’s remorse that the idiom “fast to pull the *mbus*” finds its special meaning. Based on the vital relation of dysanalogy, “fast to pull the *mbus*” means to *renege and regress in thought at a critical political time*.

• **Intentionality**

Two items are related by intentionality if the relationship between them implies desire, hope, fear, intention and memory. According to Džanić (2007), intentionality is a particularly important vital relation because it reveals the motivation for feelings, thoughts and human actions. In other words, two items are related by intentionality if one triggers or motivates the occurrence of another. The present study identified one modified idiom in this category:

vii) *Awkward squad*

“Squad of kleptocratic redoubts”

The idiom *awkward squad* means “a group of individuals who obstruct progress or express dissent in an organization.” The item “squad of kleptocratic redoubts” was collected from the *Daily Nation* newspaper dated 8th May 2017. Writing about graft in the Kenyan Government, Gaitho (2017) used the modified item “squad of kleptocratic redoubts” to evoke special meaning. The background of the item suggests that skyrocketing food prices have been decried by many. It is interesting to note that Kenya is a productive country that can sustain all the individuals through agriculture. However, the government hoards food items and lies to citizens that drought has caused food shortage. At the time when election campaigns are in top gear, loyalty to politicians is reinforced through food handouts. Gaitho (2017) points out that an awkward squad uses strategies such as sabotage and treachery to achieve their mission. In a similar way, the government has betrayed citizens by rewarding criminal agents of food production during electioneering period. These agents of food production are manipulated by the government to mislead people on food shortage. Against the backdrop of the intentions of the government, the meaning of the blended idiom “squad of kleptocratic redoubts” comes out as *a government comprising of recurrent thieves who manipulate citizens through disingenuous excuses*.

• **Cause-Effect**

When one element is understood as the result of another, the vital relation between them is that of cause-effect. This relationship implies that the present situation can be traced to certain occurrences in the past. The study identified one modified idiom that meets the criteria of cause-effect.

viii) *Drop one's guard*

“Be a guard of nothing burger”

To drop one's guard means to be less vigilant especially at a critically dangerous time. The item “be a guard of nothing burger” was collected from a section of *The Standard* newspaper dated 1st September 2017. This article was written by Makau Mutua who is a distinguished professor of law. Mutua (2017) paints a vivid picture of the Attorney General's ineptness and ignorance during the nullification of the 2017 Presidential Election results. It emerges from the article that the Attorney General (Githu Muigai) manipulates the Kenyan constitution in a rather ridiculous fashion to suit the needs of the presidential aspirants. The explanation used in the article mirrors the observation of Cîmpean (2017) who describes a nothing burger as a person who is entrusted with sensitive responsibilities but he messes his office.

The annotators established that for one to drop their guard, they have to forget their weapons. In the same way, a nothing burger in the constitutional context possesses scanty legal knowledge. Second, one who drops their guard has little regard for training. Turning to the Attorney General, the article reveals that he manifests serious knowledge gaps and often resorts to guesswork. Another interesting aspect of a soldier who drops guard is that they are easily manipulated

by the enemies. Similarly, the Attorney General is tossed by political leaders and he acts as their rubberstamp. The result of dropping one's guard is often a Waterloo defeat. Makau Mutua refers to the lost war in ICC to convince readers of the maladroit way in which Githu Muigai handles constitutional affairs. The meaning of the idiom "be a guard of nothing burger" comes out as *a politically convenient goalkeeper in guise of a chief legal advisor*.

• Representation

When one input corresponds to the elements in another input, the vital relation is that of representation. This shows that an item is a portrayal of the actual element. The study collected one idiom that meets the criterion of representation as a vital relation.

ix) *Battle of nerves* "War of tomfoolery and kite flying lingo"

The reconstructed idiom "War of tomfoolery and kite flying lingo" featured on 1st October 2017 after the presidential elections were nullified by the Supreme Court. Written by Wangari (2017), the article describes how The National Super Alliance Party (NASA) aspirants began appealing to intelligent attorneys to help them interpret the constitution for a democratic election. The meaning of the idiom *battle of nerves* is a conflict in which nobody is willing to back down. The writer uses the phrase "tomfoolery and kite flying lingo" to depict the kind of manipulative language the NASA politicians are using to sway their followers. Certain links can be established between battle of nerves and kite flying lingo. First, one who engages in a battle of nerves remains resilient in the fight. In the same manner, NASA leaders are stubbornly determined to appeal to lawyers and general public. Second, a battle involves all manner of crude weapons aimed at weakening the enemy. Turning to the article, it emerges that NASA leaders resort to logical fallacies, intense propaganda, and manipulative rhetoric to win the elections. Further, a battle involves strategies of making the enemy afraid. NASA leaders equally use law jargon to threaten their opponents. Bearing in mind that the jargon used by NASA leaders represents the actual intention of instigating a post-election warfare, the vital relation helps in suggesting the meaning. "War of tomfoolery and kite flying lingo", therefore, means *a cunningly devised rhetoric that can cause an insurrection*.

• Property

Property as a vital relation links two items if they share a characteristic. The elements in one input space may share characteristics. In such instances, the shared features warrant the description of the vital relations as property. The study identified one item that relates with the original idiom through property.

x) *Long arm of the law* - "Wrong arm of the law"

The above item was collected from *The Standard* newspaper dated on 21st August 2017. This was just two weeks after the General Elections had been concluded and President Uhuru Kenyatta announced the winner. The article features irate citizens of Siaya County who held demonstrations to oppose the presidency of Uhuru Kenyatta. It is interesting to note how the demonstrators took advantage of their large numbers and began pelting and insulting police officers who tried to calm them down. The idiom *long arm of the law* means “far-reaching power of the government authorities”. The idiom implies that there is nowhere an offender can go without facing the wrath of the law enforcers. The backdrop of the blended idiom suggests that Kenyan police officers are characterized by ruthlessness, cruelty, excessive use of force, and inattentiveness to the pleas of the victims. By using the word “wrong” in place “long”, the idiom achieves special meaning. Having tried to calm the demonstrators with little success, the police officers in Siaya used “the wrong arm of the law” by clobbering irate citizens. Therefore, the idiom “wrong arm of the law” means to *apply violent means to tame or calm an irate mob*.

Conclusions

This study endeavored to interpret modified idiomatic expressions using the tenets of the Cognitive Integration Theory. The study had two objectives: to explore the structural and lexical modification of idiomatic expressions and to interpret the modified forms using vital relations. The study has established that Kenyan newspapers use colorful language to evoke special meaning especially within political contexts. The motivation to flout the canonical forms of idiomatic expressions is intentional and geared towards communicating special messages to readers. The study has also found out that political discourses apply idiom modification strategies such as substitution, addition, and reconstruction to achieve communicative value. Vital relations such as category, intentionality, dysanalogy, cause-effect, and property have been extensively used to modify idioms in political discourses. The study concludes that modified idiomatic expressions make political discourses brilliant and more appealing. Also, the interpretation of modified expressions requires a firm understanding of tenets such as vital relations and blending strategies. This paper recommends that readers should use the lenses of Cognitive Linguistics to interpret the meaning of linguistic phenomena when grammar fails to provide backstage cognition.

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