

Understanding Satirical Texts in Kenya's Television: A Pragmatic Study of Selected Episodes of Bull's Eye on Kenya's Television station *ntv*.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the character, form and structure of satirical texts in Kenya's T.V programme *Bull's Eye*. Data from the study was drawn from 2012 episodes of the programme. The main data for the study comprised 3 episodes of *Bull's Eye* purposively selected from 2012 video clips. The selection of the episodes was guided by the length and characteristics of the video clips. Analysis of the data is based on Schmitt's (2010) Theory of Pragmatics that analyses how the form and structure of a text constitutes to varied readings. The results showed that the programme has distinct characteristics such as irony, ridicule, humour, exaggeration and a distinct structure; narration, variation of the journalist's voice (inflection) and inter-texted images. The study revealed that these characteristics and structure of the satirical texts resulted in different readings among from their original contexts.

Keywords: Theory of Pragmatics, Structure, satirical texts, characteristics, inter-texted images.

1. Introduction

Kenya's use of satire on TV is a fairly new concept. Unlike in 1st world countries where media freedom was enjoyed from early on, in Kenya, media freedom to date remains questionable. In fact, the World Audit Organization placed Kenya at position 76 in World Press Freedom Rankings in the year 2014. As such, use of satire on T.V especially to skewer politicians and Kenyan politics would not be allowed much space in the past. However, with the end of former President's Moi's reign in 2002, Kenya's democratic space received a major boost under the then President Kibaki. Media freedom albeit disputable, benefitted from this change in regimes, birthing T.V satirical programmes such as *Bull's Eye*. As noted by Brown (2010), the advent of the T.V satirical shows allowed for the lampooning of Kenya's former President Moi which would have been unthinkable when he was in power in the 1980's and 1990's.

The Kenyan T.V satirical texts are an attempt to point out to the Kenyan public, the wrongs and ridiculous unfolding's of their politicians and politics. These texts indirectly seek to sensitize the larger Kenyan public on the choices and consequences of political decisions they make, such as leaders elected into office. However, because these texts are originally derived from newsmakers and news clips then inter-texted, the resulting reading in the new structure maybe confusing albeit intended to be useful.

However, the introduction of this genre on Kenyan T.V had not been studied. As such, there was need to establish whether the Kenyan satirical television programme under study has defined characteristics and structure. How does the Kenyan producer create the satirical text? Can the end result be justified as a satirical text? What are the readings arrived at by the audience? To answer this, it was imperative to define a satirical text and establish what constitutes its structure and characteristics.

1.1. Satirical Texts.

Satirical texts are utterances which are inextricably bound up with context of situation, with participants in discourse and with frameworks of knowledge (Simpson, 2003). Three key elements are brought out in Simpson's definition: context, participants and knowledge. It is important to note that the programme under study must have the three elements present to be categorized as satirical. Analysis of the programme clearly indicated the inclusion of the elements in its production. The context is captured by the vast and varied original events used by the producers to create the new text which is satirical. The participants are defined by the three elements defined by Simpson in this way; "satire is configured as a triad embodying three discursive subject positions: Satirist (producer of the text), Satiree (An addressee whether reader, viewer or listener), Satirized (subject critiqued in the satirical discourse)." The frameworks of knowledge are embodied in the awareness of

the producer in creation of the satirical text and the information at the disposal of the reader/viewer when decoding the text. The following is a sample drawn from *Bull's Eye* that captures the context, the participants and how frames of knowledge shape both the producer and viewers responses.

Bull's Eye: Forgive me to ask, are they animals or humans? From the posture and dressing, one can say they are human beings, real people or *watu* if you like. But are they? No, no, no! They are animals, funny animals and maybe, just maybe a kind of creature that is still evolving. Just see how they tear into each other. (An insert of sounds of pigs grunting as the politicians engage in physical fights.) And all these over near nothing. But what was that nothing anyway? Ahaa, it was all just about a robe. A shiny robe that indicates one is a leader. Leadership? That is it! A robe! They think that's all they need to get to heaven!

In the above scenario, the original information constituted politicians engaged in physical fights over Mayoral elections. While the producer of *Bull's Eye* seeks to aggressively point out the politicians' greed for power, the result can only be made more effective through exaggeration, hence the insertion of sounds resembling those of pigs grunting as the politicians throw fists at each other. The insertion of the pig grunts is also very intentional and symbolic. Pigs are associated with dirt, greed and lack of coordination. These traits are transferred to the politicians by the producer when he introduces the sounds. Further, the producer issues an indirect insult, cushioned in his opening question; "*Forgive me to ask, are they animals or humans?*" It is worth noting that in production of a satirical text, producers will sometimes adopt a 'tongue in cheek' approach. This means messages are implicitly put forth and it is up to the reader/viewer to listen to the producer's message at a deeper level.

Noteworthy also is how the producer trivializes the much fought for positions by equating the mayor's position to a "shiny robe". It is not enough to use just words to relay the message; the producer's inflected tone also serves a big purpose. As noted in this research, it is not only what the producer says but also how he says it that makes the difference between the original text and the satirical one. In the original context, the media reported on a country's moment of shame owing to politicians fighting over a leadership position. This was just news being reported to the public. It was a piece meant to pass information as a traditional function of journalism. However, in the satirical context, humour, anger and dismay were communicated by the producer to the audience. The producer made his Kenyan audience laugh and at the same time learn and respond to the messages he communicated. So, did the producer of *Bull's Eye* effectively bring out context in his work? Based on the above analysis, the response would be positive. The satirical text created stood out clearly from the original news item it was derived from.

Even though context was achieved, the study still sought to establish whether the programme *Bull's Eye* had the other two elements present. We would seek to know if participants were defined and whether frameworks of knowledge were important and adhered to. The participants in this case were the *Bull's Eye* producer (satirist), the Kenyan consumers of *Bull's Eye* (satiree) and the various political councilors engaged in the brawl (satirized).

However, the Kenyan audience required to understand or to have had access to the original information to understand the producer's message. To a viewer/reader ignorant of the original information (news), questions on the necessity of the producer's anger captured in the inflected voice or the 'supposed nonsense' captured by the insertion of the 'sounds of pig grunts' and the slow motion presentation of the fights, might arise. The idea of satire would then be lost on them. As Elliot (2004) notes, because satire often combines anger and humor, it can be profoundly disturbing – because it is essentially ironic or sarcastic it is often misunderstood. The Kenyan producer has to therefore not only employ skill in creation of the satirical text, but he must also speak to an audience aware of the original events or else his message might be misunderstood or in extreme cases, completely lost.

In light of the above, if we were to test Kenya's *Bull's Eye* in Simpson's framework of satirical texts, then the programme would fit well as a satirical one

1.2 The Function of Satirical Texts

Ziv (1988) argues that among the many functions of satirical texts lies the intellectual function. This function he notes is based on absurdities, word play and nonsense and it provides pleasure in the temporary freedom from strict rules and rationality. This function provides the journalist with an opportunity to point out the wrongs in the society in a clever way. How do we make the silly and wrongs things done by our politicians appear exactly as such while at the same time keep the Kenyan audience attentive? How else can the Kenyan journalist ridicule and expose vices and follies of Kenyan politicians without fear of legal consequences? This is a concept achieved by the journalist creating a satirical text that makes Kenyans laugh but at the same time learn about things they would ignore if presented in a straight forward manner. Therefore, unlike the traditional informative role of journalism, satirical texts do not just settle at humoring and informing the audience. Instead, they challenge the audience into thinking about issues at a deeper level.

1.3 Why are these satirical texts not understood?

The satirical texts unlike news or general information may not always be understood by the audience. What is sad however is the idea that among some audience, they may not even be aware that they need the satire in their media. As a result, the media has to blend what its audience knows it wants and needs, with what it cannot anticipate but it must have. Satirical programmes could arguably fall on the latter.

Simpson (2003) argues, that for satirical texts to be understood by the audience, a number of questions have to be asked:

- i. What assumption does the producer of the text make about the addressee?
- ii. What are the contextual constraints in terms of place and time that enable its success as a piece of satirical discourse?
- iii. What happens if the text does not work?

In response, analysis on the Kenyan satirical programme provided these results:

- i. That the producer of *Bull's Eye* assumes he is speaking to an audience knowledgeable enough at an academic and intellectual level. Satirical texts are pieces of work not easily understood at the first reading. As such, literacy levels and the ability to process information well and fast are key. The audience needs to not only decode the message, but do so correctly and within the first reading (remember, this is television and messages run only once).
- ii. The audience needs to be aware of the original information and contexts to understand the satirical texts. Moore (2009) notes, the practice of juxtaposing sound bites or quotes all but disappeared in journalism because few reporters had the time or inclination to search for context. However, producers of satirical texts have revived this juxtaposing. The audience in turn needs to be aware of all the different scenes that have been brought together to create the new text. As the audience, we need to be aware of when and where the event happened in the real time, to understand the meaning when producers juxtapose these events. If the audience can learn to differentiate the news program from the satirical text, then the messages communicated by the producers might just be easily understood.
- iii. What happens if the text does not work? The study found out that in the Kenyan scenario, the result would be the same as that achieved by stand up comedies such as *Churchill Show*. The audience laughs but does not learn anything. This is as a result of the humour prevalent in the satirical program.

However, in the Kenyan setting, the study established that audience proper decoding of the messages in *Bull's Eye* are dependent upon their accessibility to news items, their level of education and their interest in the satirical program that is sometimes criticized for hitting hard on politicians of a particular political party. For instance, if a television station is perceived by the audience from the Southern part of Kenya to be inclined towards politicians from the Central part of Kenya, that station might be shunned in that region. The reverse also applies. This perception therefore might lead producers of the satirical texts to have their programs not accessed by most of the intended target audience.

2. Theoretical Framework

According to Schmitt (2010) Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. In Pragmatics, context can be defined as the set of assumptions (that is, mental representations capable of being true or false) that have a bearing on the production and interpretation of particular communicative acts. Pragmatics studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on the linguistic knowledge (e.g. grammar and lexicon) of the speaker and listener, but also on the context of the utterance, knowledge about the status of those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker and so on. In this respect, Pragmatics explains how language users are able to overcome apparent ambiguity, since meaning relies on the manner, place and time of an utterance. This theory has the following key areas of interest:

- The study of the speaker's meaning, not focusing on the phonetic or grammatical form of an utterance, but instead on what the speaker's intentions and beliefs are.
- The study of the meaning in context, and the influence that a given context can have on the message. It requires knowledge of the speaker's identities, and the place and time of the utterance.
- The study of implicatures, i.e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed.
- The study of relative distance, both social and physical, between speakers in order to understand what determines the choice of what is said and what is not said.
- The study of what is not meant, as opposed to the intended meaning, i.e. that which is unsaid and unintended, or unintentional.
- Information Structure, the study of how utterances are marked in order to efficiently manage the common ground of referred entities between speaker and hearer

The satirical texts create new meaning through the inter-texted images, the producer's narration and the supposed dialogue taking place among the news makers. This theory therefore will be used in understanding how new meaning created in the form of satire is different from the news program. It will be useful in establishing how the producer's choice of words, the juxtaposed videos, and utterances create new meaning. This theory is also beneficial in helping to understand how satire works. In piecing together the images, utterances and events separated by time and place, producers create a different context from the original one. Further, the way the messages in satirical commentaries are communicated is not in a literal manner but an implied one. The audience has to understand the speaker's meaning, place and time of the utterance and the intention of the journalist in order to get the message in these satirical programmes. This theory will therefore be important in analysis of the audience response to the messages in the television political satire programmes.

3. Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study, only three episodes of the television show *Bull's Eye* were purposively selected for analysis.

Data analysis of the use of voice inflection & inter-texted videos

Mungatana: ...*anachenga moja, anachenga mbili, anapatia Prime Minister Mungatana. Prime Minister anakwenda, Prime Minister anakwenda, anafika Gichugu anapatia President in waiting Martha Karua. Karua ndio huyo, Karua anakwenda, Karua anakwenda, Karua ndio huyooo, goooal!* (...)

Bull's Eye: It's a mad mad world, ladies and gentlemen. Danston has his hero after all. He is not only ogling his job, he has perfected his mannerisms as well. But what is inspiring Mungatana to such amazing fetes of revealing his heroes and heroines?

Martha Karua speaking: *Martha Karua ameota ndota akiwa state house akitawala hii nchi* (Martha Karua has seen vision of herself ruling Kenya)

Bull's Eye: [Do I hear someone saying to dream is happiness to wake is reality]?

Text 1

Text 1 is a classic example of how voice inflection and inter-texted images are used effectively to create a satirical text. In the text, a former Member of Parliament (Mungatana) is addressing a public rally, campaigning for his preferred presidential candidate, former Member of Parliament Martha Karua. Mungatana stands on the podium, fly whisk in hand and begins a sort of football commentary with the players being himself and Martha Karua. He dances on the podium, waving the flywhisk as he commentates on the imaginary football game where Martha Karua scores a perfect goal amid the opponents in the field. The thousands gathered for the rally applaud his theatrics because the message sent to them is that Martha Karua will walk away with the presidency come Election Day. Mungatana alludes that with Karua at the helm and him as her Prime Minister, theirs will be a co-ordinated government, full of the right moves needed to score well with the people.

A key characteristic of a satirical text is irony which is effectively achieved by text 1. When he begins narrating, the *Bull's Eye* producer equates Mungatana's behavior to madness. He makes snide comments meant to make people laugh but at the same time relay a message to the audience. This is captured in his inflected voice. For instance, he calls Mungatana's behavior 'perfected mannerisms, amazing fetes and ogling his job'. When Martha Karua states that she had a dream where she saw herself ruling Kenya, he gives a cutting but humorous retort '*Do I hear someone saying to dream is happiness to wake is reality?*' His tone of voice when he says that changes and it becomes apparent that he is not only laughing at Martha Karua and her dreams but he wants the audience to do so as well.

Further Mungatana's comments and those of Karua are separated by time. The two spoke in different rallies at different times. However, because the two worked as a team, the inter-texting of the utterances to create a supposed conversation effectively brought out the desired effect.

The pair (Martha Karua and Danston Mungatana) on several occasions had been very poorly ranked on the possibility of winning the Presidential elections. The possibility of them occupying Kenya's State House as the Head of State and Prime Minister were almost zero. As told by the *Bull's Eye* producer, the intent is to make Kenyans laugh at the ironies of such situations and probably in the future, this will see a reduction in the number of people vying for the Presidential seat. Kenya has had a history of quite a number of candidates vying for this seat even when it is obvious, they are just wasting Kenyans time and at times the States resources.

The irony in this clip is explicit but unfortunately the humour in that irony made it impossible for some of the audience to understand the intention of the producer. While some laughed and understood what was being communicated, some laughed and missed out on any other message.

Kiraitu Murungi: ...*na Cabinet iliamua mtoto akifanya makosa lazima achapwe* (Cabinet decided that if a child errs, he must be caned).

Bull's Eye: Is that the case mama Murungi?

Murungi: I am sure I was not dozing but I don't think we discussed caning would be brought back to school.

Bull's Eye: That's interesting, very interesting.

President Kibaki: *Lazima kuchapa wao na kurudisha wao wasome tena* (they must be caned so they can study)

Murugi: I think most of these are personal opinions not government opinions.

Text 2

Text 2 presents us with a supposed dialogue among former Minister's in the Kibaki regime, Kiraitu Murungi, Esther Murugi and former President Kibaki himself. The issue at hand is that of re-introducing caning in schools. The Kenyan education system allowed for caning of students whenever they erred. Issues such as noise making in class, late coming to school, failure to make agreed cut marks for subjects taken or anything cited as indiscipline by the teachers from the students, was met with caning. Students would have their palms or at times the soles of their feet caned. The Kibaki regime abolished the caning but after a period of time, some politicians sought to re-introduce the practice citing poor performance by students and heightened cases of indiscipline. The above text addressed that controversial issue.

However, the *Bull's Eye* producer's intent was to point out the discord and confusion existing in a government that ought to speak as one. The producer uses this issue of caning just as an example to call the attention of the people to the conflict existing in the government. While the former President and his Minister Kiraitu Murungi state that Cabinet agreed on caning in schools, Minister Esther Murugi gives a contrasting view. She says that she was in the same Cabinet meeting as the President and Kiraitu but they did not even discuss the possibility of re-introducing caning in schools. Discord, confusion and a negative side to the government is created.

But then what characteristic does the *Bull's Eye* producer use in this case? Antithesis is the most dominant. Notice how the text creates an almost perfect conversation between Kiraitu Murungi, the *Bull's Eye* producer, Esther Murugi and former President Kibaki. While in the real time the utterances happened in different times and different occasions, they sought to address the same issue. However, it was obvious the issue wasn't clarified seeing as the Ministers were disagreeing on what was agreed by the Cabinet that they ironically were a part of.

Antithesis therefore becomes a key tool in the satirist hands. It can be used to create most of the other characteristics of satire. For instance, to achieve irony, the producers may have two or more people in a supposed dialogue, each presenting a contrasting answer to the same question as noted in the above example. As such, the antithesis then is used to further create irony, humour, and critique among other intents of the producer. In text 1, the producer shows not only the irony in Ministers disagreeing on an issue they discussed in Cabinet but also criticizes such behavior.

Bull's Eye: Forgive me to ask, are they animals or humans? From the posture and dressing, one can say they are human beings, real people or *watu* if you like. But are they? No, no, no! They are animals, funny animals and maybe, just maybe a kind of creature that is still evolving. Just see how they tear into each other. [And all these over near nothing]. But what was that nothing anyway? [Ahaa, it was all just about a robe. A shiny robe that indicates one is a leader. Leadership? That is it! A robe! They think that's all they need to get to heaven!]

Text 3

The *Bull's Eye* producer in the above text was criticizing the Kenyan politicians' violent behavior when vying for seats. He calls them 'funny animals, a kind of creature that is still evolving' to ridicule the fact that they regard themselves as democratic but will resolve their issues instead with physical fights. He points out that while these politicians will continually refer to themselves as democratic and honourable, in truth, they are not there yet and are still handling issues the 'backward' way through physical fights. Therefore they are 'funny animals' for publicly engaging in such intense but humorous fights. They are 'evolving creatures' because they are still going through phases and are yet to find democracy.

This producer further reduces the mayor position that was the cause of the fighting to 'a robe' and laughs at what these politicians call leadership. He says "*Ahaa, it was all just about a robe, a shiny robe that indicates one is a leader. Leadership! That is it!*" He belittles the Mayoral position to tell the audience that it does not warrant such violent behavior. He then laughs at these politicians for placing such importance to a position he considers little. This producer sarcastically points out what our politicians call leadership. His emphasis and disgust when he questions whether such behavior warrants leadership is effectively communicated in his tone of voice. Further, his statement "*they think it's all they need to get to heaven*" shows people so ignorant that they will do anything for political positions. To such politicians, these positions are so important

and have to be fought for at all cost, almost like they were getting direct tickets to heaven. The producer's tone of voice changes when he questions whether this is leadership while pointing out the ignorance of such politicians to what is and what is not important.

All these characteristics are implied and not directly voiced. This reinforces the Theory of Pragmatics that focuses on the study of implicatures, i.e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed.

4. Conclusion

The study established that ntv's *Bull's Eye* is indeed a satirical program that has a very distinct structure and characteristics. Further, that there is always an intended/preferred meaning by producers of satirical program in their work. However, these intended meanings may sometimes be properly decoded by the audience and sometimes the audience may have different interpretations owing to the characteristics of satirical texts, literacy levels, age, perception and co-switching channels during news time.

The Theory of Pragmatics allowed for the study to conclude that indeed contexts will always matter in any reading. The theory acknowledges that new texts can be created from an original text, but that the meanings of both will be bent on readers/viewers understanding the context. The study emphasized on pillars of Pragmatics that focus on not just the phonetic or grammatical form of an utterance but also on the speaker's intentions and beliefs, implicatures, i.e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed, the meaning in context, and the influence that a given context can have on the message.

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