



Discrediting Opponents as a Communicative Goal of Impoliteness in Parliamentary Discourse

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate the use of impoliteness strategies by senators to discredit opponents during the impeachment motion of the Second Deputy President of Kenya in the Senate. The proceedings of the impeachment motion of the Deputy President were used for analysis. The data for the analysis were sourced from The Hansard Kenya, where twenty-one utterances with impolite remarks made by senators were purposively sampled for examination. The utterances were sampled from the proceedings of Wednesday afternoon of 16th October 2024 and Thursday morning and afternoon sessions of 17th October, 2024. The researcher identified the impoliteness strategies based on [1] theory of impoliteness. The data was analysed qualitatively. A Guiding card facilitated the data analysis procedure. The researcher conducted a content analysis of the impoliteness strategies sampled in order to determine the purpose for which they were applied by the senators during the impeachment trials of the second Deputy President of Kenya. Findings indicated that senators used bald-on-record, negative, positive and withholding impoliteness to discredit the various opponents for example the Deputy President by portraying him as corrupt, tribal and unfit for office or the witnesses as malicious without well founded evidence to support the removal of the Deputy President. This was in order to influence the outcome of the debate. This study contributes to the field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics by revealing how impoliteness, as a communicative tool, interacts with Kenya's multi-ethnic and multi-party context to reinforce divisions, a common concern across these fields in understanding language's social impact. Through qualitative content analysis of Hansard excerpts, the study also underscores the universal function of discourse in constructing political narratives and influencing institutional outcomes in democratic settings.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Impeachment, Impoliteness Strategies, Parliamentary Discourse, Communicative Goals, Discrediting Opponents

1. Introduction

The impeachment of Kenya's second Deputy President in 2024 was the first of its kind in the nation. Article 150(1)(a) of the Kenyan Constitution outlines specific grounds for impeaching a Deputy President, including gross violations of the Constitution or other laws, serious misconduct, and physical or mental incapacity to perform official duties. As [2] emphasizes that these grounds must be substantive and supported by enough evidence, underscoring the importance of due process during Senate hearings. Globally, impeachment processes are shaped by principles of public trust and constitutional integrity. For instance, the U.S. Constitution defines impeachable offenses as "high crimes and misdemeanors," a phrase open to interpretation influenced by political dynamics, party affiliations, and public sentiment [3].

Impoliteness, as conceptualized by [1], involves strategic verbal acts that threaten an interlocutor's face to achieve communicative goals. [4] argues that impoliteness serves functions such as discrediting opponents, asserting authority, and mobilizing support, challenging the view of it as purely negative. [5] further highlights the role of perceived intent in interpreting utterances as impolite. These theoretical insights are evident in political discourse studies. For example, [6] analyzed Donald Trump's use of negative-face-oriented strategies in debates to undermine opponents and assert dominance, while [7] explored humour in Romanian parliamentary discourse as a dual tool for building alliances and masking aggression. Even in non-political contexts, such as the film *Hancock*, [8] identified positive impoliteness as a dominant strategy for asserting superiority, though it is less directly applicable to formal parliamentary settings.

While these global studies illustrate the strategic deployment of impoliteness in confrontational discourse, they reveal a notable gap: limited application of [1] framework to African parliamentary contexts, where cultural and historical factors uniquely shape linguistic strategies. Research on African discourse, such as [9], shows impoliteness as a means to challenge authority and negotiate power amid socio-political inequalities. In parliamentary settings, [10] notes frequent personal attacks and exaggerated claims that transform debates into political battles rather than legal proceedings. [11] similarly identifies ambiguous, emotionally charged language used to influence narratives and public opinion. [12] adds that strategies like sarcasm and pointed questioning allow confrontation while adhering

to parliamentary norms, highlighting the tension between debate vigour and decorum.

This tension is particularly pronounced in Kenyan parliamentary discourse, influenced by ethnic diversity, colonial legacies, and post-colonial governance challenges [13]. [14] observes that Kenyan politicians often employ metaphors and criticism for rhetorical impact, reflecting broader socio-political dynamics. The 2024 impeachment of Deputy President Hon. Rigathi Gachagua, amid ethnic tensions and post-protest governance issues, exemplifies these dynamics. Media framing plays a crucial role here, as [15] argues, by amplifying sensational exchanges and shaping public perceptions of impeachment grounds and legislator conduct.

Despite extensive research on impoliteness in global and African political discourse, there remains a significant scholarly gap in systematically applying [1] impoliteness framework to analyze how Kenyan senators use linguistic strategies to discredit opponents in highly charged impeachment trials. Existing studies, such as [9] and [10], explore impoliteness in African parliaments but do not focus on its role in Kenyan political trials, where it intersects with ethnic divisions and democratic legitimacy. The Kenyan impeachment process, governed by the 2010 Constitution and the Leadership and Integrity Act (2012), involves procedural steps like motion submission, evidence gathering, National Assembly debates, and Senate voting, stages relevant for examining impoliteness as a tool for discrediting adversaries [16].

By analyzing trial transcripts from Hon. Gachagua's impeachment, this study addresses this gap, exploring how senators deployed impoliteness to influence proceedings, undermine opponents, and shape outcomes. It illuminates the broader implications for Kenya's democratic discourse, offering insights for discourse analysts and political scientists on linguistic power dynamics in evolving democracies.

2. Parliamentary Rhetoric

Parliamentary discourse is a unique arena where rhetorical strategies balance institutional norms with confrontational goals. [17] examines parliamentary rhetoric across cultures, highlighting how strategies like insults, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions serve to challenge opponents while adhering to procedural decorum. His cross-cultural analysis reveals that parliaments vary in their tolerance for impoliteness, influenced by cultural and institutional factors. In Kenya's Senate, where ethnic and political rivalries are pronounced, Bayley's insights suggest that impoliteness may be a culturally accepted tool for discrediting opponents, yet his work lacks specific focus on African parliaments.

[18] analysed impeachment discourse as a performative speech act, using the 1998 Clinton impeachment as a case study. He argues that impeachment rhetoric constructs blame through accusations and moral judgments, often employing emotionally charged language to delegitimize the accused. This perspective is relevant to the analysis of how Kenyan senators use impoliteness shaped by factors

like ethnic tensions to frame the Deputy President as unfit.

[19] introduced the appraisal framework, which analyzes how language expresses judgment, emotion, and engagement. Their framework is useful for categorizing impolite language in parliamentary discourse, such as negative judgments (e.g., accusing the Deputy President of misconduct) or emotional appeals (e.g., outrage to rally support). While their work provides a robust tool for linguistic analysis, it has not been applied to African impeachment contexts for example Kenya, where cultural norms and power dynamics differ.

3. Communicative Goals of Impoliteness

[1] foundational framework on impoliteness outlines how various strategies threaten the addressee's face, encompassing positive face (desire for social approval) and negative face (desire for autonomy), to achieve communicative goals that disrupt interpersonal harmony. Bald-on-Record impoliteness employs direct, unmitigated attacks, such as insults or threats (e.g., "You're incompetent!"). Often associating the hearer with negative traits like failure, and is prevalent in hierarchical settings where power imbalances allow dominance without repercussions ref., [1]. It is often meant to coerce compliance or drive the addressee into a defensive position, while Positive impoliteness aims to undermine the addressee's positive face desires. Instances of positive impoliteness strategies are: Disregard, snub, or failure to recognise the existence of another, excluding the other from an activity, disassociating from the other; for instance, denying association or shared interests with the other and refraining from sitting in proximity. Show disinterest, unconcern, and lack of empathy. Employ unsuitable identity markers; for instance, utilise a title and surname in the context of a close relationship, or a nickname in the context of a remote relationship. Negative impoliteness employs techniques aimed at undermining the addressee's negative face wants. Instances of negative impoliteness tactics are: intimidate or instil a conviction that harmful actions towards the other will happen. Condescend, scorn, or mock, assert your superior authority. Display contempt: do not regard the other with seriousness. Belittle the other (e.g. employ diminutives). Encroach upon another's personal space, either physically (e.g., situating yourself closer than the relationship allows) or metaphorically (e.g., enquiring about or discussing material that is excessively personal considering the nature of the relationship), which can serve to dominate or humiliate, and withholding impoliteness which involves failing to provide expected courtesy, subtly conveying disdain or exclusion to undermine social bonds [1]. In his later work, [20] expands on these, noting additional goals like affective release (venting frustration) or strategic manipulation (provoking reactions for advantage), emphasizing that impoliteness is context-dependent and multifunctional, often blending coercion, belittlement, entertainment, and provocation to achieve interpersonal disruption. Scholars like [21] reinforce this by highlighting how such face threats create emotional responses, serving goals beyond mere offense.

One key communicative goal of impoliteness is asserting authority, where speakers leverage face-threatening acts to establish or reinforce dominance [1]. In institutional contexts, such as military training or parliamentary debates, bald-on-record impoliteness such as direct commands allows powerful speakers to assert control with minimal risk of retaliation. For instance, Culpeper notes that superiors use negative impoliteness, such as belittling or ordering, to restrict subordinates' autonomy and reinforcing hierarchical structures [1]. In the Kenyan Senate, senators may employ similar strategies to assert authority over opponents, framing the Deputy President as subordinate or unfit in order to undermine their credibility. Strengthening political alignment is another goal, as impoliteness can rally allies by targeting a common adversary. By using positive impoliteness, such as derogatory labels or disassociation, speakers can signal loyalty to a political faction, fostering cohesion among supporters [1]. This aligns with the polarized dynamics of Kenya's impeachment debates, where ethnic and political affiliations likely amplify such strategies.

Impoliteness also serves to escalate or manage conflict, a critical function in adversarial settings like parliamentary trials [1]. Sarcasm and withholding impoliteness strategies can subtly provoke discord, allowing speakers to challenge opponents without breaching institutional norms outright. Culpeper illustrates this in dramatic dialogues, where impoliteness escalates tension to engage audiences, a tactic relevant to the performative nature of impeachment hearings [1]. In Kenya's context, senators may use these strategies to manage conflict by provoking reactions that weaken the Deputy President's defence or to escalate disputes to highlight their moral stance. Finally, persuading audiences is a pivotal goal, as impoliteness can shape perceptions through exaggerated face attacks that underscore judgments or evoke emotional responses [1]. In the 2024 impeachment, impoliteness can persuade both the Senate and the public, framing the Deputy President's actions as gross to justify removal. Culpeper's framework was applied to do an analysis of the how impoliteness was applied by senators to discredit opponents during impeachment trials of the second Deputy President of Kenya in the Senate.

Discrediting Opponent

Discrediting the opponent in political discourse aims to undermine an opponent's authority, credibility, or moral standing in adversarial settings like parliamentary proceedings. [1] framework establishes impoliteness as intentional verbal acts that disrupt social harmony to achieve power-oriented objectives, with discrediting or undermining opponent being a key outcome in political contexts where actors seek to diminish rivals' legitimacy. Utterances were labelled as "discrediting" if they intentionally threatened the opponent's face to portray them as unfit, hypocritical, or divisive, with intent inferred from context and audience impact.

[22] argues that undermining opponents operates through discursive strategies such as moral evaluation, where opponents are portrayed as violating ethical

norms, or authorization, where their legitimacy is challenged by invoking institutional norms [22]. In adversarial political settings, [4] notes that impoliteness is deployed to erode an opponent's public image, enhancing the speaker's authority while shaping audience perceptions, particularly in democratic processes where legitimacy is contested. This framework is critical for understanding how impoliteness functions to discredit opponents and political figures in institutional contexts.

Undermining the opponent through impoliteness is particularly pronounced in polarized or multi-ethnic political environments, where language amplifies social divisions and power struggles. It involves manipulating representations of reality to portray opponents as threats to shared values, a tactic that resonates in democratic settings where public trust is pivotal [23]. In multi-ethnic democracies like Kenya, these strategies can increase social tension by framing opponents as outsiders to collective interests, a dynamic relevant to contexts where ethnic identities shape political alliances [24]. This study contributes to the literature by applying these concepts to a non-Western political context, examining how impoliteness achieves delegitimization in a parliamentary impeachment, and offering insights into its role in shaping power dynamics and public perception in pluralistic democratic settings.

4. Methodology

The target population for this study was all the impolite utterances made by senators during impeachment debates of the second Deputy President of Kenya. The data for the analysis were sourced from The Hansard Kenya, where the sample sizes, consisting of twenty-one excerpts with impolite utterances made by senators were purposively sampled for examination. In qualitative research, linguistic studies emphasize the concept of "information power," which highlights that the adequacy of a sample depends on its ability to capture the variability relevant to the study's objectives, including contextual specificity and depth [25]. Sampling twenty-one utterances was also consistent with the principle of data saturation, where further sampling yields little new information or insights [26].

The utterances were sampled from the proceedings of Wednesday afternoon of 16th October 2024 and Thursday morning and afternoon sessions of 17th October, 2024, to capture diverse impoliteness strategies across debate phases, representing both pro- and anti-impeachment perspectives. One researcher conducted the coding, with intracoder reliability ensured through repeated coding of data. The other researchers reviewed the coding for validation thereby achieving over 90% consistency with [1] definitions. Utterances were coded as "Ims" (Impoliteness strategy) and analyzed qualitatively using a Guiding card, a checklist based on [1] framework. The guiding card captured the types of impoliteness strategies and the indicators of each category of impoliteness strategy as discussed by [1]. Each utterance was carefully studied and interpreted to determine how it was applied to

discredit the opponents by senators. [1] theory of impoliteness was applied in this study. A Guiding card facilitated the data analysis procedure. Pertaining to ethical consideration, there were no dummy names adopted for the senators as the data is available for public consumption from Hansard.

5. Use of Negative Impoliteness to Discredit Opponents

Negative impoliteness targets the hearer's negative face, their want for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Senators used this strategy through condescending remarks and belittling opponents with the intention to undermine them.

Ims 1

Sen. Chesang:

I would like to ask the Counsel if the Deputy President knows that he is not a regional leader, but a national leader.

Senator Chesang's utterance aims to discredit Hon. Gachagua by highlighting his alleged failure to embody the national leadership expected of a Deputy President, thereby supporting the impeachment motion's charge of ethnic divisiveness. By posing this question, Sen. Chesang is able to frame Hon. Gachagua's actions such as prioritizing Mount Kenya interests as incompatible with his constitutional role. This undermines his credibility and reinforces the prosecution's narrative that Hon. Gachagua's regional focus fostered tribalism. This strategic query, directed to the Counsel rather than Hon. Mutuse, leverages the legal context to appeal to senators and Kenyans concerned with national unity, aligning with Sen. Chesang's pro-impeachment stance while subtly escalating scrutiny on Hon. Gachagua's leadership without directly confronting him.

Ims 2

Sen Olekina:

We have been entertained this afternoon, or the last two days, with the defence alleging that the shareholding utterances made by the Deputy President were in reference to the shareholding of a coalition agreement.

Senator Olekina's statement aimed to undermine the defence's argument by casting doubt on its plausibility and highlighting its inadequacy in justifying Hon. Gachagua's alleged ethnic divisiveness. By framing the defence's explanation as mere "entertainment" Sen. Olekina, who supported the impeachment, sought to undermine Hon. Gachagua's credibility and persuade senators and the public that the "shareholding" remarks were tribal rather than coalition-related, and additionally reinforce the motion's charge of ethnic division, while aligning with the prosecution's narrative to strengthen the case for Hon. Gachagua's removal.

Ims 3

Sen. Khalwale:

The Deputy President, seeing the allegations against him, I cannot imagine that he moves around with the moniker of "man of faith" and "truthful man".

Senator Khalwale's statement questioning Hon. Gachagua's self-proclaimed titles of "man of faith" and "truthful man" in light of the allegations against him aimed to tarnish his character by highlighting the perceived hypocrisy between his public persona and the serious impeachment charges. By sarcastically challenging Hon. Gachagua's moral standing, Sen. Khalwale, who is aligned with the impeachment motion due to political affiliations, sought to undermine Hon. Gachagua's credibility, persuade senators and the public that his actions, such as alleged ethnic divisiveness, contradicted his proclaimed virtues, and strengthened the case for his removal, while appealing to Kenyans who are disillusioned with leadership.

Ims 4

Sen. Nyutu:

First of all, what led him to, if he did, to think of auditing the wealth of the Deputy President? Was he an auditing institution?

Senator Nyutu's utterance aimed to devalue Hon. Mutuse (the motion mover) and the impeachment motion by challenging the legitimacy and authority of his allegations regarding Hon. Gachagua's wealth. By posing these pointed rhetorical questions, Sen. Nyutu, aligns with Hon. Gachagua's Mount Kenya region, undermines Hon. Mutuse's credibility as the motion mover, portrays his actions as overstepping his role, and appeals to senators and the members of the public who are skeptical of the impeachment. He also insinuates that the impeachment motion relies on unsubstantiated and unauthorized claims. He thus weakens the motion's corruption charge.

Ims 5

Sen. Gataya Mo Fire:

I have seen a parade of photos and utterances of the President. I did not get the relationship between what is before us and the President on this matter. Can he explain the relationship between what he has paraded before the President and what is before us, as a House?

Senator Gataya's utterance aimed to discredit Hon. Mutuse and the impeachment proceedings by highlighting the irrelevance or lack of clarity in the evidence presented. By challenging Hon. Mutuse to explain the connection Sen. Gataya, who is aligned with Hon. Gachagua's defence, sought to expose the motion's evidential weaknesses and portray Hon. Mutuse's inclusion of presidential references as a distraction. He also managed to persuade the audience that the case lacked focus thereby discrediting the politically motivated impeachment.

6. Bald-on-Record Impoliteness Strategies Used to Discredit Opponents

Bald-on-record impoliteness is the direct, unambiguous performance of a face-threatening act without any mitigation, prioritizing efficiency over face concerns. Through explicit accusations and unambiguous challenge, the senators used this

strategy to discredit opponents.

Ims 6

Sen. Sifuna:

Counsel, because you have presented a coalition agreement to explain this issue of shareholding, where does that coalition agreement leave members of political parties that are not signatories to the Kenya Kwanza agreements? What would be the place of a coalition agreement that is manifestly unconstitutional or illegal? Is it your position that in fact these advertisements that we see in the newspapers are just a charade to cover up things that have already been concluded in coalition agreements such as the Kenya-Kwanza agreement that you have exhibited here?

Sen. Sifuna aims to undermine the legitimacy of the Deputy President and the broader Kenya Kwanza alliance through questioning the counsel about the implications of the Kenya Kwanza coalition agreement, particularly its potential unconstitutionality and exclusion of non-signatory parties. His pointed inquiry into whether newspaper advertisements are a “charade” to mask pre-concluded agreements suggests deception and impropriety, casting doubt on the counsel’s position and the coalition’s transparency. This rhetorical strategy seeks to weaken the opponent’s credibility in the eyes of the audience, particularly by highlighting potential legal and ethical flaws in the coalition’s framework, thereby positioning Sen. Sifuna as defenders of constitutional integrity and fairness.

Ims 7

Sen. Murgo:

I have a question for His Excellency the Deputy President’s Counsel as to whether the Deputy President, in his own conscience, realized that this shareholding narrative was really going negative and what he did about it? Did he just go all the way up to where things are now without realizing that it was going the wrong way?

Sen. Murgo aims to delegitimize Hon. Gachagua by questioning his judgment regarding the divisive “shareholding narrative,” which framed government benefits as exclusive to Kenya Kwanza voters. By asking Hon. Gachagua’s counsel whether the Deputy President recognized the narrative’s negative impact and what he did to mitigate it, Sen. Murgo portrays Hon. Gachagua as reckless or indifferent, undermining his credibility as a leader.

Ims 8

Sen. Cheruiyot (Senate Majority Leader):

The Deputy President has committed crimes by continuously misleading members of the public through false, malicious, divisive and inciting remarks that are contrary to the provisions of Section 132 of the Penal Code and Section 29 of the Leadership and Integrity Act.

The major communicative goal of Senate Majority Leader Cheruiyot’s explicit

accusation against Deputy President Hon. Rigathi Gachagua is to discredit and delegitimize Hon. Gachagua, thereby justifying his impeachment while reinforcing the ruling coalition's political argument. By citing legal violations under Section 132 of the Penal Code and Section 29 of the Leadership and Integrity Act, Sen. Cheruiyot portrays Hon. Gachagua's remarks as false, malicious, and divisive, undermining his credibility and framing him as unfit for office.

Ims 9

Sen. Kanjwang':

I am convinced that the Deputy Speaker has committed political adultery. Sorry the Deputy President.

Sen. Kanjwang's explicit accusation is intended to delegitimize Hon. Gachagua by framing his actions as a betrayal of political loyalty and public trust, using a provocative metaphor to undermine his credibility in a Senate session. The term "political adultery," implies that Hon. Gachagua violated his allegiance to President Hon. William Ruto and the Kenya Kwanza coalition, particularly through charges of insubordination and inciting ethnic divisiveness via the "shareholding narrative." The senator intends to publicly shame Hon. Gachagua, portraying him as an opponent whose disloyalty and divisive rhetoric betray the principles of national unity and coalition governance. By deploying such a stark metaphor, Sen. Kanjwang' amplifies the moral and political weight of Hon. Gachagua's alleged misconduct, aligning with the pro-impeachment narrative to weaken his standing as the Deputy President.

Ims 10

Sen. Ali Roba:

They showed the President making a statement of, "ninyi mmepata share yenu." "You have received your share." However, that was a statement of inclusivity in context as opposed to the Deputy President's statement, everywhere he has gone, of assertive utterances of exclusivity within the population in this Republic.

Senator Ali Roba's statement criticizes the Deputy President's "assertive utterances of exclusivity" in contrast to the President's inclusive rhetoric discrediting him. By drawing a sharp contrast between the President's statements in Murang'a County, framed as inclusive ("ninyi mmepata share yenu" "you have received your share"), and the Deputy President's alleged divisive remarks, Sen. Roba undermines the Deputy President's leadership. The accusation of "exclusivity" suggests the Deputy President is fostering division within Kenya's diverse population, a serious charge in a country where national unity is a sensitive issue. Delivered on the Senate's platform, this critique leverages the chamber's authority to publicly delegitimize the Deputy President, aiming to erode trust among senators, constituents, and the media.

Ims 11

Sen. Nyamu:

When I hear the Deputy President talking and allocating shares to citizens, I am aware that he is excluding more than half the population of Nairobians from service delivery. These are the same people that me and Sen. Sifuna are always here fighting for every day for allocation of resources and services.

Senator Nyamu's statement, which criticizes the Deputy President for "talking and allocating shares to citizens" while "excluding more than half the population of Nairobians from service delivery," is to delegitimize the Deputy President. She directly challenges the Deputy President's credibility by accusing him of divisive rhetoric and inequitable resource allocation. She capitalizes on the exclusion of Nairobians and aligns herself with Senator Sifuna as advocates for their constituents to undermine the Deputy President's leadership legitimacy, framing him as neglectful of a significant urban population. This statement seeks to erode trust among senators, Nairobi residents, and the broader public, while implicitly demanding accountability and reform in leadership to address these disparities.

Ims 12

Sen. Orobwa:

We have even seen repeated utterances of causing divisiveness in this country.

Senator Orobwa's accusation that the Deputy President has made "repeated utterances of causing divisiveness in this country" serves to discredit him. Sen. Orobwa directly attacks the Deputy President's credibility, framing his rhetoric as a deliberate act of fostering division in Kenya. The accusation, delivered in the Senate during a highly charged impeachment motion, aims to portray him as unfit for office, eroding trust among senators and other Kenyans. By emphasizing "repeated utterances," Sen. Orobwa suggests a pattern of harmful behaviour, thereby strengthening the case for impeachment.

Ims 13

Sen. Osotsi:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there is one charge, because we have 11 charges, that will send the Deputy President home, it is charge No.1.

Senator Osotsi's bold declaration serves to devalue the Deputy President's legitimacy by emphasizing the severity of the first of 11 charges in the impeachment motion, framing it as sufficient to justify removal from office. This pointed statement, delivered in a public Senate session in Kenya's highly polarized political environment, seeks to erode trust in the Deputy President among senators, the public, and media. By singling out charge No.1 as decisive, Sen. Osotsi intensifies the attack on the Deputy President's credibility, positioning himself as a resolute advocate for accountability while leveraging the Senate's authority to assert the gravity of the accusation, implicitly demanding the Deputy President's ouster to uphold constitutional standards.

Ims 14

Sen Crystal Asige:

My question goes to the witness. In his Motion, he has used the Oxford Advanced Dictionary to define gross misconduct. I was just curious to find out why the Oxford Dictionary and not maybe a relevant Kenyan law, which defines the same word, if he has one, or perhaps Black's Law Dictionary, which I know all legal counsels rely upon.

Senator Crystal Asige's utterance serves to discredit the motion mover. By questioning his reliance on the Oxford Advanced Dictionary instead of a Kenyan legal source or Black's Law Dictionary, Sen Asige undermines the mover's competence and the impeachment motion's legal foundation. This impolite yet tactful challenge aims to weaken the opponent's position by emphasizing the need for greater legal precision in Kenya's impeachment trial.

7. Positive Impoliteness Used to Discredit Opponents

Positive impoliteness involves communicative strategies that deliberately attack the hearer's positive face; their desire to be liked, approved of, and connected to others. It was applied by senators through insults and making the opponents to feel uncomfortable in order to undermine them.

Ims 15

Sen Wambua:

Nonetheless, because they have chosen this path, they have made their bed; they must lie on it. The Mover of the impeachment Motion must have a very dim view of the Senate of the Republic of Kenya. He comes to us with innuendos, falsehoods, sensational statements and numbers that are dropped without a shred of evidence.

Sen. Wambua sought to undermine the Mover's (Hon. Mutuse) legitimacy by portraying his case as weak and untrustworthy, hence suggesting that the impeachment motion lacks substance and that it insults the Senate's intelligence. By stating, "The Mover... must have a very dim view of the Senate," Sen. Wambua directly challenges the Mover's respect for the institution, showing his approach as deceptive and sensationalist. Sen. Wambua's utterance therefore aims to sway senators and the public by casting doubt on the motion's validity, aligning with efforts to defend Hon. Gachagua or question the prosecution's case.

Ims 16

Sen. Onyonka:

I hold you highly and I do not think you are as idiotic as our colleagues will say.

Sen. Onyonka seeks to weaken Hon. Mutuse's legitimacy as the motion's mover by subtly aligning with criticisms of his competence while maintaining a veneer of respect with "I hold you highly." This indirect insult, suggesting that others view Hon. Mutuse as foolish casts doubt on his ability to lead a credible impeachment. Sen. Onyonka's utterance publicly questions Hon. Mutuse's intellectual capacity,

thus fitting the efforts to challenge the impeachment’s foundation while positioning Sen. Onyonka as a cunning critic who undermines the motion’s proponent without fully endorsing the insult himself, thereby weakening the prosecution’s case.

Ims 17

Sen. Tabitha Keroche:

My question is whether you are also doing the same to others because there have been many complaints about procurement departments in all ministries. I hope this continues everywhere.

Sen. Tabitha Karanja’s statement aims to diminish the weight of Mr. Abdi’s testimony linked to allegations of Hon. Gachagua’s involvement in procurement misconduct. By questioning whether his scrutiny of irregularities is applied uniformly across all ministries, she suggests possible bias or selective focus. Her question aims to shed light on potential inconsistencies in the prosecution’s evidence, thus showing efforts to defend Hon. Gachagua.

Ims 18

Sen. Sifuna:

In fact, in my entire time as an elected leader, I have met the Deputy President once and this is the second occasion when he was in the House. Honestly, both of them were very sad events. The first one was a funeral and these proceedings can also be likened to a political death if the House decides to impeach him.

Senator Sifuna’s statement aims at delegitimizing Hon. Gachagua’s leadership and reinforcing the gravity of the impeachment by framing his tenure as marked by negative, mournful events, culminating in a potential “political death.” By dissociating himself from Hon. Gachagua, noting their rare interactions at a funeral and the impeachment, likened to a “political death”, portrays Hon. Gachagua’s as socially disconnected and politically doomed thereby supporting his impeachment.

8. Withholding Impoliteness Used to Discredit Opponent

Withholding impoliteness occurs through the deliberate omission of expected politeness work, like failing to use greetings, thanks, or please.

Ims 19

Sen. Mungatana:

Wewe kama Mbunge wa Kibwezi Mashariki unayetoka Gatuzi la Makueni, je ulihisi kama unabaguliwa katika nchi hii ya Kenya? Tueleze vizuri ili tuelewe. Translation: As a Member of Parliament for Kibwezi West from Makueni County, did you feel discriminated against in this country? Explain clearly so that we can understand.

Senator Mungatana’s query to Hon. Mwengi Mutuse, the MP for Kibwezi West, asking, employs a calculated tactic to discredit Deputy President Hon. Rigathi.

Hon. Gachagua, the targeted opponent, faces charges of fostering ethnic division and violating national unity, notably through statements claiming regions like Mt. Kenya are marginalized in resource distribution, likened to “company shares,” as cited in the impeachment motion. By forcing Hon. Mutuse, a Kamba from Makueni, and the mover of the motion, to affirm or refute personal discrimination, Sen. Mungatana aims to expose Hon. Gachagua’s claims, portraying certain regions, particularly his native Mt. Kenya, as marginalized in resource allocation and government services as baseless if Hon. Mutuse denies such experiences. This public challenge in the Senate undermines Hon. Gachagua’s defence, painting his rhetoric as divisive and weakening his credibility, thus supporting his impeachment.

Ims 20

Sen. Veronica Maina:

I would like Hon. Mutuse to clarify a few issues. One, are there any charges for money laundering that have been preferred against the Deputy President? Secondly, I would like him to confirm whether the case of the Asset Recovery Agency that was before Justice Esther Maina, was fully resolved using the Consent Order.

Senator Veronica’s statement aims to devalue the prosecution’s argument by suggesting possible overreach or insufficient evidence in the impeachment claims. During the thorough probe into Hon. Gachagua’s allegations, her words strive to convince senators and the public by exposing potential flaws in the prosecution’s storyline, thereby aiding Hon. Gachagua’s defence. By declaring, “I would like Hon. Mutuse to clarify” and asking pointed questions, Sen. Veronica puts Hon. Mutuse under examination in the Senate, hence challenging the validity of his assertions.

Ims 21

Sen Osotsi:

I have two clarifications. The first clarification to the counsel for the Deputy President is on the matter of the first charge on the issue of shareholding. Can the Counsel, based on Rule 10 of the Standing Orders, explain the specific relevance of the Kenya-Kwanza Coalition Agreement as a piece of evidence?

The primary objective is to undermine the opponent, for Sen. Osotsi seeks to weaken the defence’s case by challenging the counsel to explain, under Rule 10 of the Standing Orders, how the agreement pertains to allegations of regional favoritism, thereby exposing potential deficiencies in his argument. Amid the detailed probe into Hon. Gachagua’s charges, this utterance sheds light on perceived weaknesses in the defence’s strategy, thereby supporting efforts to question Hon. Gachagua’s position.

9. Conclusion

In the impeachment proceedings against Deputy President Hon. Rigathi Gachagua, both Pro-impeachment and defence-aligned senators wielded impoliteness as a rhetorical weapon to discredit opponents, with **Table 1** revealing a total of 21

instances distributed across strategies: bald-on-record dominating at 9 occurrences (42.86%), characterized by direct, unmitigated accusations and provocative metaphors like “political adultery” to portray Hon. Gachagua as hypocritical and divisive; negative impoliteness following with 5 uses (23.81%), involving face-threatening criticism, and Condescending remarks to erode credibility and undermine mover Hon. Mutuse’s authority; positive impoliteness at 4 instances (19.04%), employing insults and creating discomfort to mock and delegitimize; and withholding politeness least at 3 (14.29%), subtly omitting courtesies.

Table 1. Distribution and frequency table for impoliteness strategies used to discredit opponents.

Impoliteness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage %
Negative	5	23.81
Bald-on-Record	9	42.86
Positive	4	19.04
Withholding	3	14.29
Total	21	100

10. Limitations

While intracoder reliability, with over 90% consistency through repeated coding checks was employed to enhance the consistency of this qualitative content analysis, the subjective interpretation of impolite utterances still carries potential for researcher bias. Future research could address this by expanding the dataset to include a larger corpus of utterances from multiple impeachment trials or comparative analyses across African parliaments, and by incorporating intercoder reliability to further minimize interpretive bias and enhance the solidity of findings.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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