

# The Power of Language as a Tool for Persuasion: A Content Analysis of Mother-In-Law Citizen TV Programme, Kenya

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## Abstract

*Persuasion remains integral to social interaction. Interactions involved in politics, mass communications, and interpersonal relations provide forums through which individuals seek to influence behavior and thoughts of others. Performance art has been documented as a vital cog in practices such as critical reflection, collaboration, creativity and communication. In Kenya, mass media through theatre arts has taken the forefront in striving to influence behavior. One such programme which has captured imagination is the Mother-in-law programme aired on Citizen TV. This study therefore seeks to exploit the language used in the programme to establish the role of theatre arts in persuasion. The programme revisits the often sensitive and tumultuous relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law. The current paper analyzes the content of eight randomly selected episodes of the programme, to explore the power that language possesses as a tool for persuasion. Results from the analyzed episodes confirm that through the language portrayed in the programme, characters exhibit persuasion through credibility (Ethos), appeal to emotions (Pathos), and appeal to logic (Logos). The familial triad that involves sons their mothers and their spouses can therefore be boosted by persuasive strategies embraced by the nuclear family. Future studies can however explore other approaches that can be complementary in the improvement of this familial triad.*

**Keywords:** Persuasion, Ethos, Pathos, Logos

## INTRODUCTION

Drama, also referred to as theatre is recognized as a form of arts that enables people to communicate feelings, thoughts, emotions and concerns. Via (as cited in Barbee, 2013) defines drama as meaning conveyed through communication among people. Toivanena, Komulainen and Ruismäki (2011) on the other hand view drama as an avenue through which people gain imagination by projecting themselves into diverse situations. Through telling of stories created by authors, drama has been used to share social and communal experiences (Beck, 2016). It is argued that the make believe drama have potential to affect thoughts, imagination, emotions, habits, and personalities of people watching them.

The coming of the electronic age has seen an inception of an array of mass media that, as observed by Beck (2016) have added diversity and extended drama to millions of people. In Kenya for instance, Citizen TV owned by the Royal Media Services is reported to have had a command of 52% of television viewers by the year 2013 (Steadman Synnovate as cited in Were, 2015). According to Were (2015), the channel uses local talents in the array of local TV content that it airs and this resonates well

with local viewers. Among the local content aired on citizen TV is the mother-in-law programme.

The mother-in-law programme is presented as a drama series of episodes lasting over a period of around 30 minutes. The series depicts a typical middle class Kenyan family setting. The script revolves around the triad linkage between a mother on one side, and her daughters-in-law on the other, and how it impacts on other family members. The producer brings on board a diversity of characters such as domestic workers, extended families, the police and politicians to show conflicting issues and to advance the central themes. The focus of programme is to capture conflicts that are witnessed between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in real life contexts (Waldman, 2009).

The mother-in-law programme has remained largely successful and enjoys a massive following and commands the largest viewership among the adult viewers in Kenya and the East African region as a whole. The popularity of the programme is informed by the array of characters used that concisely bring out real life and emerging issues in relation to marital conflicts. Although the mother-in-law programme has managed to attract many viewers, it largely remains unclear whether the arguments advanced and the spoken words persuade the viewers to perceive the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships as often strained.

The thesis of the persuasive nature of the mother-in-law programme's characters is based on the premise advanced by Lundgren and Prislín in 1998 that in the event that participants are motivated to be accurate, their arguments advance pros and cons of issues at hand which in essence implies that they portray a relatively neutral position (Wood, 2000). However, if participants are motivated to convey an impression favourable to the viewers, their arguments are selected congruent with the views held by the viewers. In such a case, they generate thought and attitude that please the viewers. Moreover, Lundgren and Prislín argue that participant's may also be motivated to advance their own position. In such a situation, they select arguments consistent with their own views and generate thoughts supportive of their own position and are likely to polarize the viewers.

Persuasion is noted as a technique capable of being used to present ideas through arguments that can persuade the viewers, in the present study viewers to have an attitude change towards real life phenomena (LiteraryDevices editors, 2013). According to Literary Devices editors (2013), three types of persuasion are commonly used by writers, and characters to persuade the viewers. They include: Ethos which is linked to ethics and enables the character to present himself/herself as credible and trustworthy; Logos on the other hand is derived from logical thinking and through it, a character attempts to persuade the viewers by being rational; the third type called pathos allows the character to exploit the viewer's emotions.

In light of the various motivations that characters can assume, this paper takes cognizance of the fact that the characters in the mother-in-law programme have potential to be motivated for accuracy, favourable impression, or defense of own positions. Consequently, the paper explores the elements of persuasion that manifests in the linkages depicted between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in the Citizen TV programme.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed the qualitative content analysis situated in the interpretive paradigm. The choice of the interpretive paradigm was informed by the aim of the study which was to interpret character's motivation and persuasion. Accordingly, the analysis relied on the researchers' interpretation of media texts. Under this approach, eight episodes were selected, and their content was analyzed for recurrent themes. Two coders were employed to conduct partial transcriptions of the selected episodes by playing them back severally, recording and delineating required themes by analyzing the meaning of words and sentence structure. The summarized transcripts were then analyzed for cues reflecting persuasion in interactions between the various characters under study. Scotts' pi inter-coder reliability value of 0.823 confirmed that there was high agreement among the two coders with regards to transcriptions made.

### **Character categorization**

Categorization of the characters was done on the basis of their relationship with Charity who played the role of mother in-law. "Mwamba", who played the role of Charity's husband, was recorded by the first coder to have appeared in 19 incidences while the second coder recorded 18 incidences of "Mwamba's" appearance. "Charlie" and "Robert" acted the roles of sons to Charity. As recorded by the two coders, the two sons were captured in 15 incidences in the eight episodes analyzed. Selina and Lisa played the roles of daughter's in-law to Charity. The two were captured in 16 incidences in the eight episodes analyzed. "Betty" acted the role of Charity's daughter and was recorded to have appeared only once in the eight episodes. "Angie", "Mike", "Olive" and "Tina" were identified as grandchildren to Charity. These grandchildren were captured in 13 incidences of the eight episodes. The next category of characters identified was 'other in-laws'. Under this category, "Joyce" and "Mama Alison" featured prominently in 7 incidences as recoded by coder 1 and in 6 incidences as per coder 2. "Alpha", "Inspector Wasike", "Maria", "Mustafa", "Ninja", "Ras", and "Wanande" featured in programme as 'other relations' and were captured in 19 incidences by coder 1, and in 15 incidences by coder 2.

### **Synopsis of the analyzed episodes**

The following sections present brief accounts of the episodes as analyzed.

#### **Season 15, Episode 1 and 2**

Lisa, Robert's wife, is planning a birthday party for him. She sends Angie and Olive who in the programme act as her step daughters to order for a cake from Nelly's place for the occasion. On their way to Nelly's, the two girls are kidnapped supposedly, by Onyi, Champez and another person who was the driver. Ninja who acts as the watchman witnesses the kidnapping, and raises the alarm. Charity's family comprising of Mwamba, Charlie, Robert and Charity herself are thrown into confusion. Charity seizes the occasion to launch an emotional tirade on her two daughters-in-law, Celina and Lisa, purporting that the two had conspired to engineer the kidnapping. The three men, Mwamba, Robert and Charlie however remain cool-headed and take the initiative to reach the police and report the kidnapping, and also to organize for the required money for the ransom. In the meantime, Joyce who is Olive's mother and a former girlfriend of Charlie feigns false outrage, and joins Charity in pillorying Celina and Lisa "evil witches", responsible for the kidnapping of her daughter. Mwamba, who is the linchpin of the home, takes control of the ransom negotiations, and pays the required ransom, resulting in the release of Olive and Angie. As the second episode

ends, it emerges that Joyce and Olive were responsible for the kidnapping of Angie in order to benefit from part of the ransom money paid out.

#### **Season 15, Episode 3 and 4**

Charity is found with knife in her handbag, as is consequently locked up in a police cell for 18 hours. On her return home, she gets into a rant showing displeasure that no one seemed to care that she had been locked up. In her rage, she decides to relocate from the house to an undisclosed place. Meanwhile, Alpha comes to Charity's house to thank Mike (who has attempted to commit suicide), for donating the required blood O-negative, and saving his life. In the event, Angie and Alpha develop a flirtatious relationship. Lisa seizes an opportunity to remind Robert that they need to move out from the parental house into their own house. Charlie also realizes the need to move out of the parental house, he points out this to Robert, and vows to finish his house and move into it.

#### **Season 15, Episode 5**

Two days have elapsed since Charity disappeared and no information regarding her whereabouts has been forthcoming. Mwamba, Robert and Charlie are getting frantic and distraught. They opt to search for her everywhere including in hospitals and mortuaries. A conversation between Celina and Lisa regarding the status of the knife in Charity's handbag is overheard by Maria, the house help. From the conversation, Maria realizes that Lisa is the one who put the knife in Charity's handbag, resulting in her arrest. All this time, Alpha and Angie's flirtatious relationship continues to blossom. Having left the parental home, Charlie apologizes to Mwamba, his father for leaving the parental home against their wish.

#### **Season 15, Episode 6**

This episode reveals that the search for Charity is still on, and Charlie appears to be the most affected by his mother's disappearance. Mwamba and Robert however fail to show such emotions. Maria decides to blackmail Lisa and Celina by making them massage and fan her, and also wash clothes for her lest she reveal their betrayal of Charity. Towards the end of the episode, Charity reappears from her hide out, a women organisation camp, accompanied with the chief. To her consternation; the family does not appear to have missed her as she had hoped.

#### **Season 15, Episode 7**

Angie and Alpha return home having spent the night at the latter's home without letting anyone know. Robert decides to seek for dialogue with Alphas mother and is forced to call her. Meantime, Charity opts to make peace with Mwamba following her disappearance. Alpha's mother arrives and everyone is stunned as she turns out to be Betty, the long lost daughter of Charity and Mwamba. The scene ends on a happy note with the reunion of the Mwamba's with their long lost daughter.

#### **Season 16, Episode 1**

Mwamba calls out Charlie and Robert to organize and move out of the parental house. Charity is however opposed to the idea, and accuses Mwamba for being greedy. Lisa plans and meets Jacob, a former classmate of hers, in a restaurant to explore the possibility of buying a house from him. Lisa hides her plan from Robert hoping to present the house as a birthday gift to Robert and in the process surprise him. Unfortunately, Robert spies (catch sight of) the two, Jacob and Lisa at the restaurant engaged in an intimate conversation, and thinks that Lisa is cheating on him. On

returning home, Lisa is confronted by a furious Robert who berates her. Mwamba's intervention however, helps to cool down the agitated Robert.

## RESULTS

Several elements of persuasion were identified in the drama series depicting the linkage between daughters-in-law and mother-in-law.

### **Ethos (credibility)**

The desire to remain persuasive by ensuring that the viewers belief in characters was identified as a common element among the characters analyzed. Ethos appeared to be communicated through diverse components in various episodes. Authority as a credibility component was manifested in episode 1 of season 16. In the episode, Mwamba desires that Charlie and Robert relocate from the parental house, but is rebuked by Charity who looks at this desire as an act of greed. In this episode, what Charity fails to realize is that Mwamba is just taking authority as the man of the house. In the episode 3, authority manifests when Lisa reminds Robert on the need to move out of their parental home. In essence, Lisa asserts the authority she has as Roberts's wife.

Ethos manifests in form of respect in the episode 5. In this episode, Charlie communicates respect when he chooses to apologize to Mwamba for deserting the parental home. More evidence of persuasive power through ethos is reflected in the expertise, with which Alison's mother seizes the opportunity to maintain the family's comfort by playing the roles that Charity was playing. Further evidence of ethos is shared in the episode 1 of season 15 in which Charity uses emotion to persuade that Celina and Lisa were responsible for the Kidnap of Angie and Olive.

Results from the analysis of the character communications reveal that characters in the mother-in-law programme invest heavily on ethos to make their arguments stronger. In building credibility with viewers, the characters hope to build trust and hence pass across their subtle messages. Characters display, authority, respect, expertise and emotion during their presentations, which are clear manifestations of ethos. These findings are consistent with views which posit that communication made via drama seeks to impact people's behaviour, changing their minds about issues and their feelings (Banish-Donaldson, Hurtt, Johnson & Suttmiller, n.d). Persuasion is therefore viewed as a central goal that such communication should look to achieve.

Moreover, Hartelius and Browning (2008) argue that the 'persona' as exhibited in ethos is the character projected by the communicator and which often gauges the communicators credibility and trust worthiness. The findings showing that characters in the programme elicit elements of authority, respect, expertise and emotion are consistent with views aired by Higgins and Walker (2012), that analytical categories such as similitude, expertise, deference, inclination to succeed, and self-criticism identify appeals to ethos. In the programme for instance, Charity appeals to the viewers in the manner she applies similitude in portraying the typical mother-in-law in the African context. Expertise is clearly elicited in the manner the characters appear to seamlessly take on their roles thereby showing the programme's appeals to ethos.

### **Pathos – Appeals to Emotion**

Pathos which according to Su-Hie (2018) is the feeling the viewers get based on emotions such as sadness, pity, satisfaction and fear triggered by the characters. Pathos emerges as a major persuasive tool that cuts across the characters in the mother-in-law programme. In episode 1 and 2 for instance, Onyi, Champez and the unnamed driver bring pathos when they kidnap Angie and Olive. This scene arouses sadness among viewers when they wonder what may have happened to the two girls. Pathos is also revisited in episode 2 when Charity attacks Lisa and Celina insisting that the two had a hand in the kidnapping of Angie and Olive.

Viewers also elicit pathos in terms of pity in some, and satisfaction in others when in episode 4, Charity is arrested for possessing a knife in her handbag. Though Charity cuts across as a hated figure, her disappearance from home living Robert, Charlie and Mwamba to frantically search for her even in the mortuary, as seen in episode 5 is designed to elicit fear and pity among viewers.

It is therefore evident that the mother-in-law programme exploits the persuasive power of pathos in appealing to the viewers emotionally and winning them over. Indeed, it is noted that through an appeal to pathos, a communicator is able to evoke emotions among the viewers and be able to bring on board those who may have hitherto been uninterested (Lunen, n.d.). Moreover, Smith (2009) posits that when the communicator positions himself in tandem with the desires and values of the viewers, the persuasion is likely to convey an understanding of the needs of the viewers. According to McCormack (2014), the decisions made on a daily basis can be influenced by emotions experienced in the same way the outcomes of such decisions can influence the emotions experienced.

In capitalizing on viewer emotions, the mother-in-law programme recognizes the fact that viewers can be persuaded to get the messages being put across when their emotions are stirred. This then implies that the programme bases its foundation on making an appeal to pathos using viewer beliefs, values and attitudes for most of its arguments. Use of humour for instance, as is commonly seen in the programme adds a different perspective to the presentation of information and clearly leads to viewer satisfaction (English, Sweetser & Aucu, 2011).

The exploitation of the pathos element of persuasion in the mother-in-law further supports observations by Miller and Stafford (as cited in Taquini, 2016) that emotional appeals rely on positive (humour, pride, love, joy) or negative feelings (shame, fear, guilt) to persuade the viewers. Additionally, Higgins and Walker (2012) contend that pathos relies on the intrinsic motivation among the viewers.

### **Logos-Rational Appeals**

Logical arguments and provision of factual information which are reminiscent of Logos feature prominently in the analyzed episodes. It is clear that in many episodes, characters propose views that elicit debate and arguments that require rational thought. In episode 1 for instance, after Angie and Olive are kidnapped, Charity rationalizes that since Lisa and Celina do not like her, they must be behind the kidnap. She then goes on to launch an emotional attack on the two. Logos therefore manifests itself in this scenario since Charity is attempting to apply logic in accusing the two daughters-in-law in order to persuade viewers to side with her hatred of the two. In the second episode, logos is seen when Mwamba decides to pay ransom for the two kidnapped

girls. In so doing, Mwamba postulates that viewers will be persuaded by the logic of paying ransom for the girls to remain unhurt.

Persuasion by way of Logos is clearly at play in episode 4 when Charity decides to pack and go after returning from the police cells on the premise that no one seemed to care. Her argument is that viewers will be able to be persuaded by the logic that when people are not bothered by your tribulations, then it follows that your presence is equally not valued. More evidence of logic is seen in the fourth episode. In searching for the missing Charity in hospitals and mortuaries, Robert, Charlie and Mwamba are rationalizing about her where about. In the event that one is missing, the logical thing to do is search every possible place even if it is at the mortuary. By so doing, Robert, Charlie, and Mwamba are trying to exploit the power of persuasion through logic to convince the viewers.

In episode 7, the arrival of Alpha's mother who turns out to be Charity and Mwamba's long lost daughter Betty brings immense joy and happiness for the reunion. This is pure use of logos in persuading the viewers to acknowledge acceptance of loved ones whenever they reappear. Viewers are obviously likely to be persuaded to empathize with Betty's position. Viewer persuasion through logos also manifests in episode 1 of season 16 when Mwamba feels that both Charlie and Robert should relocate from the parental house, but is accused of greed by an opposing Charity. Mwamba's act clearly resonates with viewers who are persuaded by the logic Mwamba portrays in wanting grown up men to move out and take charge of their own affairs.

The use of Logos as exemplified in the analyzed episodes is symptomatic of the key desire to persuade viewers to identify with messages being passed across. Logos as a mode of persuasion enjoys a lot of acceptance in legal arguments where it is the mode of proof mostly sought after (Kadoch, 2000). By using Logos, the characters clearly underscore the rational dimension of logical appeals that relies on viewer's curiosity for discourse that can be associated with good listening (winter, 2006). Moreover, it is apparent that the logos applied by characters in the mother-in-law show are consistent with the views of Weida and Stolley (2013) in that both the inductive and deductive approaches are manifested.

Analysis of manifestations of logos, show that in trying to be more persuasive, characters explicitly point to the evidence relevant for their point of view. For instance, Betty's appearance after a very long time is evidence enough for the celebratory mood in the reunion. Pointing to tangible evidence is consistent with the views of Stiff and Mongeau (2003) inferring that when arguments are explicitly made with their warrants, messages are more persuasive. One element observed is that characters tended to argue only in one direction thereby contradicting assertions by Stiff & Mongeau (2003). According to Stiff and Mongeau (2003), effective persuasive messages interrogate two positions of an argument before refuting the side that opposes. Messages that focus on a single argument could also be effective. The least in effectiveness as asserted by Stiff and Mongeau (2003) are messages which although they present counterarguments, they are in no position to refute.

## CONCLUSION

Drama being a theatre to mirror human behaviour enables people to communicate feelings, thoughts, emotions and concerns. All these, employ rhetoric persuasion

strategies discussed in this paper to appeal to human perception. On the other hand, with respect to the characters' relationships, the mother-in-law in the TV drama sought to persuade viewers by exhibiting negative behaviour and negative personality traits towards her daughters-in-law whereas she displayed positive behaviours towards her sons. By the use of ethos (credibility), she plays it cool when she advises her daughters-in-law to dress decently to show respect to the old fox like her and her husband Mwamba. In many occasions in the drama mother-in-law uses ethos strategies to persuade the viewers as elicited in the episodes discussed above. Daughters-in-law on the other hand have used this strategy to persuade viewers that they not only engage in petty arguments with their mother-in-law, but can actually stand out in matters of development for their families. This manifests for instance, when Lisa takes a tall decision to buy a house without the knowledge of her husband.

The mother-in-law also uses pathos (feelings that arouse emotions) as a strategy at the same time to persuade the viewers that truly mothers and their daughters-in-law in most cases have estranged relationship between them just like in some real life situations. This sends a signal to potential daughters-in-law to make wise decisions before they engage in marriage.

Mwamba being a neutral player to calm the emotions when they are heightened uses logos in most cases to persuade viewers on the role most men play in real life situations. Most people that have watched Mwamba in the drama series often perceive him as a solution to most problems mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law face in a family set up. The plot and findings of this TV drama are found to be consistent with most arguments that use rhetoric persuasion to pass messages. It is however important to note that relationships between mothers and their daughters-in-law are influenced by a diversity of factors that may require other approaches in order to persuade viewers. Besides, supportive communication, the need to belong, desire for accommodation, need to be independent, family identity, and cultural orientation are key messages that ought to be passed to others and require wit. More often than not, one party may get aggrieved when these factors are not taken care of, therefore confirming the importance of persuasion strategies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings, it is clear that relationships between mothers and their daughter's in-law could be made better if efforts are taken by members of the nuclear family to use the persuasive strategies discussed above to strengthen the in-law triad. It is necessary to allow married members of the family to have independence to exist as a married unit without often meddling in their affairs. Future studies need to take cognizance of the dynamism experienced in marriages and seek to identify other approaches that may be used to approach issues surrounding the familial triad.

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