



## A MULTI-MODAL ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES WITHIN THE ANTI-BUILDING BRIDGES INITIATIVE DISCOURSES IN KENYA

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### Abstract

Over the last few years, the use of X (formerly Twitter) for political purposes has gained prominence in Kenya. The Kenyan political elite appear to strategically maximize on the platform to propagate their egoistic political agenda. X was extensively used during the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a political season characterized by the Kenyan government's quest to unite the nation. However, this initiative came at a time when the electorate was inflamed and yearning for new leadership. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the syntactic structures that characterized tweets by the anti-BBI micro-bloggers within Kenya's political online space. The multi-modal theory was used to analyze eighteen tweets which were selected from six hashtags namely; #BBINonsense, #RejectBBI, #StopBBI, #NoToBBI, #BBIMustFall and #BBIniScam. The findings revealed that tweets were regulated by length constraints on the X platform. As a result, the written text and visual modes worked together to construct syntactic structures which included ellipsis, substitution, unique punctuation patterns, substitution, short-forms and emojis. According to the findings, the syntactic structures displayed non-adherence to prescriptive rules according to traditional grammar. Language was creatively used to compensate for the word limit constraints. The findings of this study will help shed light on language use in social media interactions and how this might affect language learning and

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teaching in Kenya. Additionally, the findings of this study shall be used by Kenyans on X (KoX) in a bid to understand the nature of the syntactic structures used in the platform.

**Keywords:** Micro-bloggers, Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), Kenyans on X (KoX), Syntactic structures, Traditional grammar.

## Introduction

The twenty first century technological developments have led to the integration of multi-modality in the communication industry. Subsequently, multi-modality in communication has revolutionized the ordering of words, text creation and the way texts and messages are comprehended. Particularly, text communication is characterized by a distinctive graphic style such as in-depth abbreviations and deviant use of language that is utilized by the younger generation (Crystal, 2004). A common trend among modern-day communicators is non-adherence to standard grammars within internet discourses. Also, internet discourses writings incorporate the orthographic shortening created through the chopping of portions of words and removal of letters within a word. Ketcham (2011) argues that language use in internet discourse contains features such as emoticons, typographical errors, pictures and incomplete sentences. The integration of multi-modality among consumers of online internet communication platforms demonstrates the dynamic nature of online syntactical structures. The focus for this study was on the passage of the desired information and not necessarily on the adherence to standard syntax structures.

Alhabash and Ma (2017) posit that Twitter (currently X) helps public professionals to maintain online associations and build confidence, which is critical to the transformation of the information-sharing landscape. Within the Kenyan political scene, proper packaging and passage of political messages play an integral role in the attainment of national integration and the citizen's peaceful co-existence. In the converse, inappropriate packaging and dissemination of a message can lead to acrimony, political hostilities, and national disintegration. The need to promote national unity necessitates the need for the implementation of legal structures that govern how political messages are packaged and

disseminated. This places importance on the manner that political messages are packaged and disseminated. In an effort to solicit for support, the political elite in Kenya maximize on the use of social media platforms to gain support from their supporters on different topics of national interest (Yaqub et al., 2017). Notably, focus was laid on both visual and textual representation and elements used in the selected tweets.

Users of X are faced with space constraint dynamics. Tweets and posts are expected to align with functional perspectives as opposed to adhering to grammatical rules. Daulay and Aulia (2024), notes that brevity, the unique space structure, and 280 characters forces X users to be concise and creative in the manner that they express themselves. Traditional grammar has been eroded and informal writing styles are gaining dominance within online platforms. The erosion of traditional grammar rules is evident in the replacement of words, phrases and emotions through the use of emoticons, memes and GIFs. In a bid to communicate effectively within X's length constraints tweeps re-structure phrases and grammar structures. This affects the standards of conventional rules of language.

Weighing in on the dynamism arising out of the growth of communication technologies, Toyoda & Harrison (2002) argue that the common features of online discourses include abbreviations, unconventional punctuation and misspelling that are caused by spontaneity where users write briefly and informally. The authors attribute spelling errors, the use of upper case and unconventional punctuation to spontaneity. These traits can be attributed to linguistic economy. AbuSa'aleek (2014) argues that linguistic economy stems from the tactic embedded on economical use of language through clippings, orthographic reductions, shortenings ellipsis, deletion of pronouns and the use of abbreviations. In this form of communication, emphasis is laid on clarity, language brevity and the articulation of the target meaning amidst the prioritization of the message.

Within the political scene, individuals craftily utilize large-scale X online engagement to amass support by forming a unified grouping around specific campaigns. The dynamic nature of X has led to the growth of new linguistic phenomena and the non-adherence to the existing linguistic features (Bennet and Segerberg, 2013). The authors argue that "connective action" prioritizes the idea of personalization of content along with the mandate of digital media in shaping the decentralized forms of

engagement. Connective actions facilitate the spread of real-time discourses that contrast the traditional dissemination of information on matters of collective interest. Connective actions have been catapulted by X features such as hashtags that play an integral role in shaping public discourses. Hashtags boost the visibility and discovery of posts, thus, increasing content engagement. Bruns et. al (2015) posit that hashtags serve as discursive nodes, which enable the creation of hashtag publics. The public hashtags are groups of persons that amalgamate around shared discourses and steer topics of interests in a bid to reach a wider audience.

The anti-BBI discourse construction was deeply embedded on creating meaning based on the existing contexts. This practice defied the Chomskian grammar that holds that meaning is derived from the appropriate arrangement of linguistic symbols. In functional grammar approach, the analysis of the language used goes beyond structural aspects into the communicative functions of the language (Feng, 2013). Halliday (1994) posits that the analysis of functional language use is based on three elements: the "ideational" (understanding the environment), the "interpersonal" (the creators of the clause and the target audience), and the "textual" or "mode" (the form in which the clauses are presented). The systemic functional grammar is highly concerned with mapping irregularities embedded in the functional use of images versus writing that exist in wide usage of novel datasets, which allows for the investigation of structural relations such as themes and focus in influencing discursive functions.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the nature of syntactic structures around BBI discourses on X considering the space constraints associated with the platform. The paper provides baseline data for used by stakeholders such as bloggers, discourse analysts, communication practitioners and digital content creators for effective communication in various contexts.

### Literature Review

Syntactic structures in X political discourses have recently attracted some research attention. A linguistic analysis carried out by Podhajská (2020) on the tweets made by President Trump indicate that he did not segment his tweets at the syntactic level. Notably, President Trump's tweets were

characterized by the use of long sentences and complicated clauses. These syntactic traits affected the readers' comprehension levels in varied ways. In comparison, Hillary Clinton's tweets contained short paragraphs with a clearer syntactical structure and stricter adherence to grammar rules, making them easy to follow and comprehend. The way speakers arrange their words reveal how their thought patterns, social status and the dynamics of power are structured. Ideally, simple to understand syntax leads to clear thinking while the use of complicated syntax reflects an obscure meaning which can easily lead to the manipulation of the public. Podhajská (2020) draws conclusions that social media language use can be manipulated through syntactical structures thereby obscuring meaning and manipulating target audiences. This paper makes similar arguments by hypothesizing that the anti-micro-bloggers complicated their tweets to influence discussions on the BBI.

Feng (2013) studied functional grammar and its implications for English teaching and learning, with the study's findings indicating that EFL students see functional grammar as a way of viewing meaning and forms as related within different options that exist in the English language. The students tend to confuse formal and informal languages due to their experiences with the English language at home. The study indicated that functional grammar is more useful if used to teach intermediate and advanced literacy students since it possesses excellent analytical capabilities, and is founded on basic knowledge. Feng (2013) was a key pillar for the current study since it provided information on the differences between the traditional grammar and the functional generative grammar, which was important for understanding the syntactical structures of the collected data.

Lelandais and Frere (2017) studied how syntactic types of subordinate clauses vary depending on informational weight, with the study being rooted in a multimodal discourse analysis perspective. This was central to examining whether several subordinate structures expressed the desired background information. The findings indicate that restrictive relative clauses, appositive relative clauses, and adverbial clauses can be easily differentiated based on the background of their communication input. The findings from this study enhanced the knowledge base that was integral in carrying out this study.

A study carried by Carrington (2004) on the online communications on the texts and literacies of the Shi Jinrui language showed that texting patterns exhibited a decline in spelling and grammatical standards, acronyms (e.g., LOL for 'laugh out loud'). Carrington (2004) notes that digital communication encompasses the use of emoticons, accent stylizations nonconventional spellings, homophones, shortenings contractions, and omission of punctuation. These findings provided a critical background in the examination of multimodalities structures in the current study.

Masroor (2019) analysed Twitter political discourses by politicians and how they orient the polarization and ideological ideals of Pakistan. This study demonstrated how political dominance and legitimization of the actions control the opinions and shape the ideologies held by the public. The study found that through the use of various linguistic features, politicians had a binary way of presenting oneself positively and negatively.

Boot et al. (2019) studied how character limit affects language use in tweets and the results indicated that character limit change was characterized by traits such as shortenings, contradictions, symbols, and numerals. These findings informed the current study since both studies were carried within the same digital space. Secondly, the findings in Boot et al. (2019) aligns to the current study which demonstrates how space constraints influence the nature of syntactic structures on X.

Albu and Capuano's (2023) research findings indicate that Twitter political discourses are entirely characterized by a shift from the/ formal register to a more flexible and colloquial form, use of short formats and highly interactive structures evident in elliptical structures. The study provided a critical understanding on the use of non-verbal verbal negation with the full form not, the telegraphic ways of expressing verbs and the non-conventional punctuation with negative markers and non-standard negative structures.

Gervasio and Karuri (2019) carried out a study on how language was used to mark identity in social media by Chuka University students indicating that students code mix English and Kiswahili as they communicate their messages. The study created a foundation on how code-mixing in digital communication occurs. The findings indicated that the group under study combined English and Kiswahili morphemes to make a single word that

makes a complete sentence with a subject, verb and object or a subject and a verb. In these sentences, tense and number are correctly marked, which points towards the adherence to the rules of syntax.

More recently, Riungu et al (2024) carried out a study entitled: Multimodality in Kenya's Political Discourse in the Social Media. Following Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal framework, the study analysed the functions of political discourse such as coercion, resistance, and representation between 2017 and 2022. The study highlighted how tweeps use salience, gaze, and loaded lexes to create meaning. These findings provide a basis for comparison with our study. In essence, the workings of the multimodal theory will be enriched besides offering opportunities for corroborating new findings

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study reported in this study was guided by the multi-modal theory of discourse analysis. The theory focuses on the analysis of the meaning of tweets made by the anti-BBI bloggers. The multi-modal theory encompasses the application of different modes in the analysis and comprehension of a specific composition. Different modes are combined to form multi-modal products that in turn create meaning. It is expected that adoption of multi-modal aspects in these tweets affects the comprehension of tweets. Interactions of the modes shapes the overall messages. As a platform, X is intrinsically multi-modal since it facilitates the combinations of modes such as written texts, images, GIFs, and emojis. According to Wilson (2023), multi-modal analysis encompasses the analysis of two or more semiotic systems, which include language, gesture, images, and sounds.

Adami (2015), O'Halloran (2008), and Baldry and Thibault (2006) developed the Halliday's systemic-functional grammar to multi-modal texts by focusing on modes as central to meaning making rather than sign-makers' expressions within social processes. Functional grammar facilitates interpretations of texts, systems, and linguistic structure elements. Essentially, systemic functional grammar is concerned with mapping irregularities embedded in the functional use of images versus writing that exist in wide usage of novel datasets, which allows for the investigation of structural relations such as themes and focus in influencing discursive functions.

Founded on the multimodality principles, the complications ingrained in length constraints are handled through semiotic resources, choices and arrangement. The semiotic selections are steered by communicative purpose as opposed to adherence to the traditional grammar rules. Thus, to achieve the study's objectives, the multimodal theory was used analyze and interpret the data collected for the study.

Bennett & Segerberg (2013) note that the dynamic nature of X shapes the rapid spread of information, influencing public narratives and real-time discourse. The use of hashtags to propagate the dynamic and transformational dissemination of desired message, and thus, hashtag nurtures mobilization, constructs resources and exemplifies critical discourses that resonate with audiences. Being a digital space, X users utilize both syntax and modes like rhythm, body movements, emojis and intonation to create meaning. These modes played an integral role in the analysis of tweets and the interpretation of how syntactic structures were utilized to propagate the anti-BBI campaign in Kenya.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This paper adopts a mixed research approach whereby both quantitative and qualitative data on syntactic structures is examined among political BBI micro-bloggers. X presents unique length constraint features that makes it an appropriate platform for the study of syntactical dynamics with digital communication technologies. Mixed research offers a holistic and fuller picture that boosts the enhancement of descriptions and provides deeper inference (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Maroko et al, 2021). Mixing the quantitative and the qualitative methods was sequential with qualitative carrying more weight. The quantitative approach offered a statistical account of the findings which were eventually discussed qualitatively.

### Population and Sampling

The population for this study was drawn from 120 anti-BBI tweets from six hashtags. That is, the tweets originated by anti-BBI micro bloggers formed the target population for this study. Out of the 120 tweets, 18 tweets were selected purposively for in-depth study, three tweets from each of the six

hashtags. The orientation of the study was multimodal with a single tweet featuring multiple modes including the textual mode, images, and emojis. This meant that analysis would be multi-layered. Therefore, taking a larger sample would have presented analytical complexities, thereby denying the study the desired depth. Yaqub et al. (2017) cite that in scientific twitter studies, the data can be harvested using keywords and hashtags. In this study, the 18 tweets were harvested from repeated types of syntactic structures. For each type of syntactic structure represented in the study population, three were selected to represent the category. A deliberate effort was made to include syntactic structures which incorporated various modes in sync with the multi-modal theory that guided this study. The tweets were selected between 2019 and 2021 as the period was marked by intense BBI debates on social media especially on X (Gathara, 2019).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A data-generated checklist with features for six syntactic structures was used to select data from the 18 syntactic structures. To achieve validity and reliability, authors independently examined the selected syntactic structures and inherent features for unanimity. Where gaps were noted, they were re-examined and discussed to ensure inter-rater reliability was achieved among the authors. The confirmed study data was systematically recorded numerically under the six identified hashtags.

The various syntactic structures in the study data were closely examined for patterns and expressed in frequency tables. This quantitative approach was followed up by the qualitative analysis of the syntactic structures as used in their immediate contexts within the six hashtags.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study sought to identify how the anti-BBI micro-bloggers managed to communicate with the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) target audience. The features considered for analysis under this study included the use of ellipsis, substitution, punctuation, code-switching, emojis and shortfoms as captured in the table that follows.

**Table 1.** The frequencies and occurrences of syntactic structures features in selected anti-BBI tweets

Hashtags	Ellipsis		Substitution		Punctuation		Codeswitching		Shortforms		Emojis	
	# of occurrences	%	# of occurrences	%	# of occurrences	%	# of occurrences	%	# of occurrences	%	# of occurrences	%
#NotoBBI	4	13	20	26	10	18	2	6	6	18	2	14
#BBIisaScam	11	37	4	4	14	25	5	17	7	21	3	21
#BBiNonsense	1	3	15	19	5	9	3	10	3	9	1	7
#StopBBI	4	13	10	13	8	15	9	30	6	19	2	14
#BBimustfall	8	27	13	17	7	13	5	17	6	18	3	21
#RejectBBI	2	7	16	21	11	20	6	20	5	15	3	21
<b>Total</b>	30	100	77	100	55	100	30	100	33	100	14	100

The table captures the nature of syntactic structures in six hashtags that were used to push for the anti-BBI agenda. The findings indicate that the anti-BBI political tweets maximized on the use of six types of syntactic structures. The results indicate that ellipsis was highly used by tweeps in the #BBIisaScam and #BBimustfall with the cumulative percentage being 64 per cent. Under substitution, the top two hashtags #NotoBBI and #RejectBBI recorded a combined incidence of 47. Patterns around punctuation indicate that #BBIisaScam and #RejectBBI had a combined total of 45 percent. On code switching #StopBBI and #RejectBBI had a combined total of 50 percent while in shortforms #BBIisaScam and #StopBBI had a representation of 40 percent. Finally, syntactic structures had higher incidence in #BBIisaScam, #BBimustfall and #RejectBBI with a cumulative total of 63 percent. The findings in this study align with findings by Carrington (2004) which indicate that online communications are characterized by non-conventional spellings, acronyms, contractions and omission of punctuation. This points to a shift from conventional language use to patterns exhibiting peculiarities that define digital platforms.

In the next part of this paper, it would be of interest to discuss the actual usage of the 18 syntactic structures in the selected hashtags in this study. Qualitatively, the findings of this study indicate that different modes were used to construct the syntactic structures in this study. In Extract 1, for example, the syntactic structure integrates a written text, two emojis and sentential code-switching.

**Extract 1: Tweet 91#6**

We shall make our position known at the ballot 😊 ...*utajua hujui wewe* 🐵

The extract is drawn from a preceding tweet where a tweep had responded to a prominent politician's tweet in the push for support of the BBI. The emoji of a shining face expresses positive emotions. A combination of the text and the emoji 😊 indicates that the blogger is elated that they shall vote out the BBI. In the second part, *utajua hujui wewe* 🐵 can loosely be translated to "You will know that you don't know." Combined with the emoji of the monkey, the tweep suggests that the supporters of the BBI are stupidly waiting for a sad state of affairs. In this case, the emojis enhance the meaning of the message by helping to communicate additional information to what is captured in the wording. The use of the two emojis is closely tied to the length constraints on the X platform.

Other tweets integrated shortforms, ellipsis, and the use of comma to link independent clauses to fit within space constraints on X. Extract 2 is an example from this study data:

**Extract 2: Tweet 112#5**

This government has money, but not for NHIF

This gvt has money for BBI, but not for medics,

This govt has money, but not for PPES.

This gvt has money for BBI, but not for public health education.

This govt whose BBI you want to trust? Really?

In this text, *government* has been abbreviated to *govt*, while the comma has been used to shorten compound sentences. The corrected text would have read as follows:

This government has money, but not money to finance the NHIF

This government has money for BBI, but it does have money for pay the medics.

This government has money, but it does not have money to buy the PPES

This government has money for BBI, but it does have money to finance the publication health education.

Is it the same government who BBI you want to trust? Really?

In this text, some of the words used in this tweet have been reduced to allow the creation of a space compliant text. The reduction caused by the use of ellipsis does not affect sentence clarity, and thus, writing the information that is necessary never overshadows the intended meaning of the tweet.

Three types of ellipsis were observed in the study data: anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric ellipsis. We discuss them step-wise. According to Zdravkovska-Adamova (2017), anaphoric ellipsis exists where the omitted item is recoverable later in the text. Extract 3 illustrates anaphoric ellipsis:

#### **Extract 3: Tweet 90#2**

It is so unfortunate that No leader is emphasizing the importance of medical health care, everyone is preaching this rubbish document as if it would take everyone to heaven. #BBINonsense

The pronoun *it* is empty. It is can be understood by looking forwards for interpretation. Later in the text, it refers to “No leader is emphasizing the importance of Medical health care.” The tweep was talking about the finances required to campaign, launch, and implement the dictates of the BBI amid the harsh economic times and health complexities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another illustration is expressed in Extract 4:

#### **Extract 4: Tweet 69#2**

*Those* of you who are *young* may not know that this country (Kenya) has a rotten history “Dr.\*\*\*#REjectBBI. They don’t know because some clique in govt does everything in its power to hide/distort the true history of KE

In this text, the use of the term *those* is an anaphor that can be understood after reading *young* later in the extract. In this case, the tweet is understood

following an interaction with the text that follows. Extract 5 below, further underscores the manifestation of anaphoric ellipsis:

**Extract 5: Tweet 14#3**

These politicians are basically threatening us to either embrace BBI or be ready for war...*it's* embarrassing... we don't need BBI to implement very basic rules #BBIMustfall

The anaphor used in this tweet *it is embarrassing* refers to using *BBI to implement very basic rules*. To understand the anaphor, the audience has to understand the preceding information.

Shifting focus to cataphoric ellipsis, Zdravkovska-Adamova (2017) notes that it exists where the item that has been omitted is traceable in a preceding text as indicated in Extract 6:

**Extract 6: Tweet 55#1**

Another simpler way to go on would have been Jubilee rules well, *which* have been obviously challenging and near impossible...give Deputy President *his* 10 years as per agreement...then \*\*\*\* can shoot his clean shot in 2032. I know you'll throw insults but that would be a cheaper way #NoToBBI

Cataphoric ellipsis has been used in this tweet in the words, *which* that refer back to "Jubilee rules", and *his* in backward reference to the "Deputy President." From the tweet, we realize the use of the pronouns *which* and *his* as anaphors of the sentence. Contextually, the interpretation of the pronoun has to be retrieved from the preceding text.

In exophoric ellipsis, Zdravkovska-Adamova (2017) notes that meaning is retrieved by making reference to the outside discourse instead of the following and preceding texts as happens in anaphoric and cataphoric ellipsis respectively. Extract 7 is illustrative of exophoric ellipsis:

**Extract 7: Tweet 32#6**

Majority of Kenyans agree with you 🇰🇪 #RejectBBI

In Extract 7, the pronoun *you* does not have an obvious forward and backward reference. Instead, the readers should go outside the text for its

interpretation. In this connection, the surrounding context involved a Kenyan activist who stated that BBI seeks to serve the interests of two men. Another blogger tweeted in support of the activist who in this case is identified by the pronoun *you*. This means that majority of Kenyans agree with the activist that the BBI sought to realize the interests of the two prominent politicians that pushed for its implementation.

In Extract 8, the pronoun *us* also requires an exophoric reference for meaning:

**Extract 8: Tweet 71#6**

Immanuel...God with *us*!

Viewed out of context, it will be difficult to decipher the meaning of *us*. However, the surrounding context was the group of bloggers who were against the BBI. Therefore, the anti-BBI bloggers believed they had a compelling case against the BBI. In this case, *us* refers to anti-BBI bloggers who are exuding confidence that *Immanuel* (God) is with them.

In another case of exophoric reference, the word *REFERENDUM* in Extract 9 requires outside reference for meaning:

**Extract 9: Tweet 21#3**

IEBC SAYS *REFERENDUM* TO COST KSHS 14 BILLION!! #NoToBBI

To gain the meaning of *REFERENDUM* in the tweet, one has to analyse the context of the discourse which in this case was whether Kenyans will approve or reject the BBI in an electoral referendum. Therefore, *REFERENDUM* in this refers to the electoral process to determine whether BBI will get Kenyans' approval or rejection.

Another syntactic structure that characterised anti-BBI discourse was substitution. Hasannejad's et al. (2013) notes that substitution ties two components of a text where one replaces the other. Substitution occurs in three forms; namely, the substitution of a nominal noun with a noun (nominal substitution), substitution of a verbal group by another verb (verbal substitution) and substitution of a clause with a pro-form (so) (clausal substitution). Of the three types, nominal substitution and clausal

substitution were detected in the study data. Consider Extract 10 exemplifies nominal substitution:

Let us first consider clausal substitution in Extract 10: Tweet 11#4

There are two users that call *their customers illegal drug users* or Kenyan Politicians calling *their followers fools* and we seem to be agreeing in unison #BBIisascam.

The nominal *their customers* is substituted by another nominal *illegal drug users* while the nominal *their followers* is substituted by the noun *fools*. This tweet was made by an anti-BBI blogger in a discussion about the discussion against the BBI. The opposers of BBI felt that supporters of BBI were influenced into supporting BBI through drug use. As a result, they supported BBI without question and were therefore regarded as *fools*. It is noteworthy that substitution has occurred where a noun or nominal replaces another not only to eliminate redundancy but shorten text in line with space constraints on X. Extract 11 further illustrates nominal substitution.

**Extract 11: Tweet 39#4**

\*\*\*\**selfish arrogant politician* but *she* is right about \*\*\* and \*\*\*\* none of them care about Kenya #BBIisascam.

From the tweet, we notice that the pronoun *she* has been used to substitute the nominal *selfish arrogant politician*. In this tweet, the name of a prominent female politician at the beginning of the tweet and uses a pronoun to substitute her name. In this case, substitution is used as an enhancer of a logical connection between the pronoun *she* and its antecedent. Extract 12 illustrates clausal substitution.

**Extract 12: Tweet 27#1**

*What's up Kenyans WAKEUP, #KomeshaBBI guyS* The BBI is a f&\*k creature of the March 2018 handshake between \*\*\* and \*\*\* following the contested 2017 president election outcome #NotoBBI

In tweet 12, The clause *What's up Kenyans, WAKEUP* is substituted by a nominal *#KomeshaBBIguyS*. A blogger is nudging people to rise up and reject the BBI. It is notable that the tweet deviates from conventional mechanics of when and how to use either the lower or upper case letters. It can also be observed that the second clause *#KomeshaBBIguyS* involves

sentential code-switching between Kiswahili (*Komesha*) and English (*BBIguys*).

Another interesting observation about syntactic structures was the use of punctuation marks. Abdulmumini and Musa (2024) define punctuation symbol that indicate the end of a sentence, list items in a series, express surprise among other applications. From the data in this study, a variety of punctuation marks were employed sometimes in ways deviating from conventional punctuation in English. Consider Extract 13:

**Extract 13: Tweet 68#4**

#mondayreport has@\*\*\*\*just said 2billion is peanuts to the government????? @\*\*\*\* #BBIsASCAM.... Kenyans are suffering out here, no money to pay medics, teachers ...Kenyans, it is high time we wake up!

In this tweet, the question mark has been repeated five times while the three elliptic marks are used after listing two cadres of civil servants in Kenya. The repetition of the punctuation mark in this tweet bore the impact of emphasizing on the laxity or insensitiveness of the politician who made the remark amid the economic hardship shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic when the post was made. Additionally, the use of the elliptic marks signifies that more items would be listed under the category of the government staff. It is notable that a comma separates the subject in the last sentence with the remainder which is an urgent call to action as expressed by the exclamation mark. Extract 14 presents another set of punctuation marks:

**Extract 14: Tweet 27#1**

What's up Kenyans, WAKEUP,#KomeshaBBIguys The BBI is a f&\*k creature of the March 2018 handshake between \*\*\* and \*\*\* following the contested 2017 president election outcome #NotoBBI

In Extract 14, there is the use of the apostrophe to create the contracted form of *What is*, a comma to combine the exclamative clause *What's up Kenyans* with the imperative clause *WAKEUP*. Ideally, both sentences would have been expressed separately and punctuated by exclamation marks. Notice also how upper and lower case letters are mixed freely in the phrasal verb *wake up* to signal the lax application of mechanics of spelling on X. It is also notable that the word *f&\*k* employs an ampersand and an asterisk to mask the intended obscenity. At the end of the last statement in the tweet,

punctuation marks are missing. This probably occurred as the acceptable word-limit had been attained.

It also emerged that tweets that ended with emojis did not have any punctuation marks as expressed in Extract 15.

**Extract 15: Tweet 104#6**

- Why it is on constitution amendments that precisely don't point out on people's real problem...
- Apart from cheap incentives that can be passed in parliament
- Wasting resources that can be put into better use 🥰
- BBI is a trap mark my words

The tweet above exhibits poor punctuation structures evidenced by the absence of full stops at the end of the sentences. In the sentence i, elliptic marks are used in place of a full stop while in the third sentence, the full stop has been replaced by a heartbreak emoji. The tweet implies that tweets are generally characterized by unconventional punctuation structures and that the emojis may be used to substitute punctuation marks. From this, we see that punctuation as used in traditional grammar is not adhered to on the X platform. It is also notable that the written text can be complemented by emojis in a multi-modal relationship.

Another form of syntactic structures in the study data was short forms punctuated by exclamation marks as exemplified in Extract 16:

**Extract 16: Tweet 2#1**

BBI 1: Three words YOU should not forget in 2021! 1. Irregular 2. Illegal 3. Unconstitutional. #NoToBBI #WeThePeople #BBINonsense." - May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

It is notable that the tweet uses short sentence structures and involves the use of an exclamation mark, numerals and full stops. The use of an exclamation mark makes the first sentence particular and specific to an unfortunate instance that happened in 2021 and is therefore expected to evoke the emotions of shock and surprise. The tweet lists numbered items to make it easy to understand and more persuasive.

Syntactic structures in the study data also featured code switching patterns. Ezeh *et al.* (2022) aver that code switching is a phenomenon used in natural languages within multilingual contexts where linguistic varieties are used interchangeably in the same conversation. From the data selected for this study, it was noted that in the anti-BBI discourse, codeswitching was used at the intra-sentential and inter-sentential levels. Extract 17 illustrates intra-sentential code-switching.

#### Extract 17: Tweet 101#2

Watu wa “Bado itapita” where art thou? 🤔💀.

Extract 17 indicates code-switching within the sentence where the Kiswahili expression *Bado itapita* is inserted within the sentence. was posted as a reaction to the court’s nullification of the quest to legalize the BBI. The tweet employs the laughing emoji to express extreme laughter and the skull emoji to show that the tweep was dying of laughter. Textually, the tweep is sarcastic about the fate of BBI supporters after the nullification of the BBI agenda by the High Court of Kenya favoured them. The happiness emoji is closely juxtaposed with the skull emoji which is used to signify extreme reactions and death. Integrating the text in the tweet with the emojis used gives additional meaning to the post. In the tweet, the tweep laughs out loud since the hopes of those who supported the BBI have been thwarted, and thus, hindering the actualization of the BBI. Extract 18 further illustrates how written text was code-switched with emojis:

#### Extract 18: Tweet 80#3

Very useless pple 🗑️🗑️ and now they are trying to avoid a referendum so that we don’t vote against that snake called BBI#Lindakatibba#bbimustfall #BBIjudgement Wanjiku has gotten justice for once 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉

Emojis were used to compensate for length constraints in the anti-BBI discourse. In Extract 18, the emoji 🗑️🗑️ is used immediately after the words *useless people* to connote that the people in question should be thrown into the garbage bin since the ideas that they espouse are perceived to belong to the gutter. In other words, they need to be disposed of. The tweep laments that the people are working on developing schemes that would

deny the electorate the chance to vote against the BBI. In the second sentence of the tweet, the emojis 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉 are code-switched with the preceding written text to show the celebratory mood that the tweep is in after the court ruling which favoured the anti-BBI group by nullifying the BBI project. From this tweet, we notice that the emojis that were used reflected the feelings and reactions of the tweep in each of the contexts. Code-switching was also found to occur at the inter-sentential level as illustrated in Extract 19:

**Extract 19: Tweet 24#3**

In the tweet extract Some Kenyan leaders are either stupid or ignorant. And Some Kenya citizens are either bewitched or dull. This is “\*\*\* bedroom” Do they need BBI or proper housing?? *Ile Ujinga iko Kenya ni crossbreed ya ukoloni wa akili na ushenzi*

It can be seen that codeswitching has taken place at the inter-sentential level. The first part of the tweet centred on the functional aspect of language. The tweep is focusing on passing the desired message using inter-sentential code-switching as the best syntactic structure to realise this goal. The target audience understands more than one language and thus code switching does not affect the comprehension of the text. The tweet reflects the traits of metaphorical code switching which emphasize the anti-BBI campaign. The Swahili words used *Ile Ujinga iko Kenya ni crossbreed ya ukoloni wa akili na ushenzi* can be translated as *The stupidity margins evident in Kenya are the resultant product of a crossbreed between the colonization of the mind and barbarism*. The tweep intends to add more weight on the perception that Kenyan leaders are either ignorant or stupid and this is best captured by the use of the Swahili language that appeals to a majority of X users in Kenya. Another case of code-switching was intra-sentential code-switching is expressed in Extract 20:

**Extract 20: Tweet 24#3**

Thank you, Reverend, for speaking the truth to power. May more men & women of the cloth join you. BBI is a lie. It will entrench corruption. More elite to eat yet they have not delivered for *WaKenya*. Look how COVID19 money was stolen while most remain in extreme need. #BBI Nonsense

In this tweet, intra-sentential code switching was used. A Kiswahili word is used in the middle of an English sentence. The use of *WaKenya* (*Wa* is a Kiswahili prefix meaning “people of”) instead of *Kenyans* was used to emphasize the subject of the tweet. An analysis of the syntax does not depict the tweep’s deficiency in the English language. Since the context of the discourse is Kenya’s political scene, code switching was used to allow the usage of a term that is commonly used by the political elite while addressing the Kenyan electorate. Another case is Extract 21:

**Extract 21: Tweet 48#6**

Am happy that the local *Mwananchi* is really up to speed with all the controversies and deficiency surrounding the BBI debate and going by the reaction I feel like majority of them feel the timing isn’t rights. #RejectBBI

*Mwananchi* is a Kiswahili word translated as the “an ordinary citizen” and used to refer to the Kenyan citizens. The word was used intra-sententially to speak to the heart of Kenyans being expressed in the national language of the people of Kenya.

Another notable structural feature of tweets was the use of short forms. Devereux (1984) points out that short forms involve the shortening of words by dropping some part or a section of a longer word or phrase. It was observed in our study data that most tweets were expressed in short forms such as contracted words, abbreviations and clippings. Extract 22 demonstrates the application of some of the short-forms.

**Extract 22: Tweet 94#5**

Ghana *govnt* has extended free water and electricity for the next three months...in Kenya *there's* funds for Corona that we *can't* explain has it was used...*it's* high time Kenyans should open eyes to say no to this *govnt*...#StopBBI

In this case, the word “government” has been shorted by dropping some letters to form *govnt*. Similarly, the contracted forms *there's*, *can't*, and *it's* are used perhaps to fit the tweet within acceptable word limits on X. To further explore how shortening was used in this study, Extract 23 is discussed.

**Extract 23: Tweet 51#3**

MCA's should be left to do their constitutional mandate without duress, manipulation from KRA and EACC #BBI~~must~~Fall

From tweet Extract 23, it can be seen that acronyms were used to shorten the length of tweets. The initial letters of the word *Member of County Assembly* were used to create MCA, while *Kenya Revenue Authority* was used to form KRA and *Ethics Anti-Corruption Commission* were used to create the words MCA's, KRA and EACC. Since these acronyms are common in Kenyan political discourses, they are considered conventional and easily understood. The use of abbreviations was adopted as another type of short-form in the study data as illustrated in Extract 24.

**Extract 24: Tweet 29#4**

The winner-take-all narrative by the president is not addressed by BBI, president, *dp*, *pm*, *dpms* all from the same majority party...*helb* loan, tax holiday for youth owned business, ward fund are only to entice the voters....#BBIISASCAM

In this extract, the initial-based abbreviations are *dp*, *pm*, *dpms* and *helb* that stand for *Deputy President*, *Prime Minister*, *Deputy Prime Minister* and *Higher Education Loans Board* respectively. The adoption of abbreviations was dictated by word-limit constraints on X.

The data in this study demonstrated a blend of modes in the construction of length compliant syntactic structures. The use of emojis emerged as a preferred visual mode. Invented by Shingetaka Kurita Burge in 1999 (Leonardi, 2022), emojis are a two-dimensional pictogram that are authentically created with the purpose of conveying emotions between individuals engaging in text-based dialogues (Sadia, 2018). Extract 25 illustrates contrasting emotions.

**Extract 25: Tweet 101#2**

Watu wa "Bado itapita" where art though 🤔👁️.##BBINONSENSE

The tweet was posted as reaction to the court's nullification BBI. The tweep sarcastically asks where the pro-BBI supporters are now that the initiative had been quashed in court. The emoji 🤔 is a representation of a face with tears of joy used to signify extreme happiness and laughter. The emoji 👁️

indicates that the tweep was extremely excited about the judgment delivered by the court. The happiness emoji is closely juxtaposed with the skull emoji 🦴. This emoji signifies that pro-BBI supporters and the BBI itself had been dealt a death blow by the nullification. Another set of emojis are expressed in Extract 26.

### Extract 26: Tweet 80#3

Very useless pple 🗑️🗑️ and now they are trying to avoid a referendum so that we don't vote against that snake called *BBI#Lindakatibba#bbimustfall #BBIjudgement*. Wanjiku has gotten justice for once 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉

The emoji 🗑️🗑️ is used immediately after the words *useless pple*, and connotes that the people in question should be thrown into the garbage bin. This implies an existence of a bunch of useless people that need to be disposed of. The tweep laments that the people are working on developing schemes that would deny the electorate the chance to vote against the BBI. In the second sentence of the tweet, the emojis 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉 show a celebratory mood after the ruling of the court favoured the anti-BBI group by nullifying the BBI. The choice of the two sets of emojis is a pictorial representation of what would have required many words to express and therefore fall off the word limit on X. However, the interplay between text and emojis illustrates salience, gaze, loaded lexes which featured in similar work by Riungu *et al* (2024) on Multimodality in Kenya's Political Discourse in the Social Media.

### Conclusion

This study examined the nature of syntactic structures used by anti-BBI micro-bloggers in Kenya. Findings indicated that multiple modes were used to compensate for the length constraints within X, which deviated from the traditional syntactic structure rules. It also emerged that syntactic structures on X were characterized by ellipsis, substitution, peculiar punctuation, sentential code switching, short forms and emojis. The

integration of the features discussed in this paper is triggered by a need to pass the desired message within limited space on X. Challenges posed by length constraints amidst the urge to post highly impactful tweets probably led to syntactical compression. Notably, the traditional syntactical structures were replaced by abbreviations or non-standard grammatical options. To convey the desired messages, tweeps also drew inferences from contextual settings using emojis. One therefore argues that posts made online tend to be brief and syntactically modified. The findings of this study could help shed light on language use in social media interactions and how this might affect language learning and teaching in Kenya. Additionally, Kenyans on X (KoX) might find the results of this study useful in future construction and processing context on X.

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