

ABSTRACT

The shift of human interaction to the online space is giving rise to online discourses that differ from both the spoken and the written discourses in significant ways. One of such discourses in Kenya is the emerging multimodal online hate speech, which manifests in form of less explicit but highly inflammatory content that tends to impede effective investigation and prosecution of hate speech cases. How ideological out-groups are created, demonised and depicted as worthy target of hate is a form of violent proposition achieved through deliberate use of persuasive rhetoric means that leverage multiple signification strategies of FB and Twitter. Not much research has focused on how specific Twitter and FB communicative practices produce, propagate and shape the contemporary online hate discourses in the Kenyan context where hate speech keeps incarnating to circumvent various monitoring systems. Applying Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) on a purposive sample of three hundred and sixty (360) Facebook posts, one hundred and twenty (120) tweets in the ratio 3:1 and thirty online respondents, this study sought to: explain forms of hate speech in FB and Twitter in Kenya; examine the extent to which specific linguistic devices used in FB and Twitter yield hateful pragmatic potential; establish visual and technical strategies used in the construction and dissemination of hate speech; and finally, investigate the users' interpretations and perceptions on online hate speech. Data was collected from eight Facebook groups and six popular hashtags using a memory enhanced tablet phone. Data collection involved online observation, retrieval and electronic storage of posts and tweets that trended between June and October 2017; the period prior, during and after 2017 general election. Electioneering period in Kenya is believed to witness more hate speech than other times. The respondents filled online questionnaires. Data analysis was done through a language focused Multimodal Content Analysis. The findings yield insight to the area of Applied Linguistics by offering a triangulated approach that bridges methodological and theoretical limitations of the CMDA in analysing multimodal discourse to reveal how dynamics affecting language use in the digital spaces significantly alter previous patterns of communication. The findings show how users' hateful intentions motivate their choice of meaning resources and the style from the emerging online multimodal repertoire to achieve deliberate meaning contestation and obfuscation that characterise online hate speech. The findings offer hate speech law enforcers the linguistic criteria for reading early symptoms of hate speech and detecting hate speech crime with a view to developing appropriate response mechanism. In addition, the National Commission on Integration and Cohesion (NCIC) and Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK) may find the findings of this study insightful in guiding policy making regarding responsible use of internet and the role of FB and Twitter in creation and dissemination of counter hate narratives in order to forestall the negative impact of the online hate speech prevailing in Kenya.