

# Indigenous Languages as a Prerequisite Tool for Democracy: The Case of Kenya

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100200>

Received: 10 November 2025; Accepted: 20 November 2025; Published: 04 December 2025

## ABSTRACT

Democracy is an integrated political system which came about through the infusion of two political traditions; liberty which is often called freedom and popular sovereignty or self-government. Liberty belongs to individuals, while popular sovereignty is a property of the community as a whole. Therefore, democracy is a systematically structured form of freedom. It is about justice, equality and the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression fosters publics to clearly put forward their needs and demands on governance. This is only made possible through a language that the citizens understand best. Language embodies knowledge, identity, and human relationships, it creates and is created by society. Therefore, democratic politics is politics in vernacular. It therefore implies the use of a language that encourages all players to make an effort to understand each other. This involves the willingness to overcome the barriers to mutual understanding, including the linguistic ones. Using the three communicative democratic theory tenets discussed by Young (1996): greetings, rhetoric and storytelling, this paper analyses the strategies that are used to enhance the possible democratic space by our leaders through the use of the indigenous languages having in mind that Kenya is a multilingual society. Data was purposively sampled through You-tube to get a leader who used indigenous languages during various public meetings. The Right honourable Raila, Amolo, Odinga strategically used greetings in the indigenous languages of every community before addressing them. He also used rhetoric and storytelling/narration to bring the people together to appreciate an intimate experience that brings out a deeper understanding and respect for each other's language.

These enhances inclusivity and tolerance despite the linguistic differences, hence a democratic society.

**Democracy; Indigenous Languages; Freedom of Expression; Multilingualism 1.0**

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy can be defined as a government in which sovereignty lies with the people either directly or via representatives. Ambuyo, Okal & Amukowa (2017) argued that globally, the spread of democracy has been accompanied by the global spread of criticisms of democracy. They continue to argue that freedom and democracy, while suitable in some parts of the world are by no means universal goods. Democracy is an integrated political system which came about through the infusion of two political traditions; liberty which is often called freedom and popular sovereignty or self-government. Liberty belongs to individuals, while popular sovereignty is a property of the community as a whole. Liberty involves the dos and don'ts of the government to its citizens whereas self-government has to do with the way those who govern are chosen. Therefore, we can summarize that democracy is a systematically structured form of freedom. The more democracy is applied beyond the state, in regional and transnational governance, the more we need conceptual tools to decide whether we are actually talking about increased democracy or prerequisites to create and enhance democracy.

This is because democracy is the one form of government which evolves constantly to ensure that it is possible through a self-correcting system. Kasimi (2020) explains that a democratic country is not possible without justice, equality and the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression fosters publics to clearly put forward their needs and demands on how the authorities should perform their duties. Freedom of expression is only made possible through a language that the citizen understand best. Language embodies knowledge, identity, and human relationships. It creates and is created by society, hence responsible for *creating* social realities through understanding of different social phenomena which can shape thoughts and actions in a variety of ways. Moreover, Skutnabb-Kangas, Maffi, and Harmon (2003) explains that language is a vital and fundamental expression of people's culture and our way of being and seeing the world. It is one of the most fundamental ways in which we strengthen community wellbeing, reaffirm our sense of belonging, express our culture, and sustain our family connections and our communities place in society. In addition, language stores our history and knowledge, progressed over thousands of years, and ties us to our country and each other.

The foundation of this work is the relationship between language and democracy, which constitutes a fundamental part in human life. Kymlicka (2001) argues that "democratic politics is politics in the vernacular." This statement can be challenged positively and or negatively through answering some pertinent questions. What happens in a multilingual community? Does it mean that democratic politics is impossible in a multilingual community, whether at the local, national, regional or global level? Nakata (2024) explains that in the global era, the diverse cultures, languages and knowledge of the worlds' entire population, not just the Indigenous population, are rapidly disappearing into a much smaller number of homogenised cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. However, sharing in the views of Kymlicka (2001) this paper assumes and maintains that democratic politics implies the willingness of all players to make an effort to understand each other. This involve the willingness to overcome the barriers to mutual understanding, including the linguistic ones. Any time that there is a community of fate, a democrat should search for methods that allow deliberation according to the two key conditions of political equality and participation. If linguistic diversity is an obstacle to equality and participation, some methods should be found to overcome it. This is to be evaluated by looking at the possible democratic space exhibited in Kenya by our leaders, through the use of the indigenous languages.

UNESCO has an essential role to play in providing International frameworks for education policy and practice on key and complex issues. Language and, in particular, the choice of language of instruction in education is one such concern and often invokes contrasting and deeply felt positions. Questions of identity, nationhood and power are closely linked to the use of specific languages in the classroom. Educational policy makers have difficult decisions to make with regard to languages, schooling and the curriculum in which the technical and the political often overlap. While there are strong educational arguments in favor of mother tongue (or first language) instruction, a careful balance also needs to be made between enabling people to use local languages in learning, and providing access to global languages of communication through education. Significant changes have taken place over the years, there have been immense political transformations birthing new language policies especially in postcolonial and newly independent countries. Hundreds of languages have disappeared throughout the world and many more remain endangered; migratory movements have brought new and varied languages to other countries and continents; the internet has dramatically affected the way in which language and languages are used for communication and indeed for learning; and rapidly accelerating globalization increasingly challenges the continued existence of many small, local identities frequently based on languages. While some countries opt for one language of instruction, often the official or majority language, others have chosen to use educational strategies that give national or local languages a chance to enhance bio-cultural diversity (UNESCO, 1953). This is one way of enhancing the democratic space not just for the indigenous languages but also the people using the languages, as they can express themselves in a way that they can comprehend best.

Moreover, At a global level, the World Federation of Modern Language Teaching Associations (FIPLV) and UNESCO's Linguapax Committee have been active in drafting further instruments and recommendations such as the Pecs principles (FIPLV, 1991), which informed the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights. 10 This

was adopted at the World Conference of Linguistic Rights held in Barcelona 6 - 8 June 1996. It is based on the concept of equality for languages and therefore avoids the terms regional or minority languages which have been used to restrict the rights of language communities. Currently, the Declaration has no legal force, but it sets out an agenda for policy and legislation <http://www.troc.es/mercator/main-gb.htm>. Its starting point is that 'linguistic rights are individual and collective rights at one and the same time'. It lists five personal rights which may be exercised in any situation namely: To be recognized as a member of a language community, to the use of one's own language both in private and in public, to the use of one's own name, to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin, to maintain and develop one's own culture. The four 'collective rights of language groups are: For their own language and culture to be taught, access to cultural services, an equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media and to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socio-economic relations. However, some of this ideas are making basis for policy in the area of language teaching and learning, even if they are not in a position to guarantee the full range of linguistic rights.

The constitution of Kenya 2010 take cognizance of the diversity of languages. In chapter 2 article 7 states that; 7. (1) The national language of the Republic is Kiswahili. (2) The official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English. (3) The State shall— (a) promote and protect the diversity of language of the people of Kenya; and (b) promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities. The promotion and protection of this languages can only be evident through their usage. Mose (2018) and Abiyo (2024) noted that Kenya is a multilingual country with over forty different indigenous languages. Initially, its language-in-education policy for early primary education was enacted in 1976. Subsequent education commissions have not altered its core content. Mother tongues should be used as languages of instruction up to grade three – assumedly taking its cue from UNESCO's (1953) position that mother tongues are ideal for early education. The Kenya Educational Policies; Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2012 and Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) 2017 specifies the use of the language of the catchment area (the language of the school community) as the language of instruction from pre-primary level to primary grades 1-3. From grade 4 onwards, English is used as the medium of teaching. As much as Education is deliberate on the use of indigenous languages, this paper seeks to look at the political space as another avenue where the indigenous languages has a pivotal role as a language that speaks from and to the heart of people and hence a prerequisite for democracy in Kenya.

## 2.0 Statement of the Problem

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 has a deliberate democratic provision of the use of indigenous languages in various places in Kenya. This paper looks at indigenous languages in the Kenyan democratic space as a tool for linguistic freedom to shaping public opinion, and behavior. Holding onto the argument that democratic politics is politics in Vernacular, this paper is analyzing the strategies used by political leaders while using the indigenous languages as a prerequisite for democracy in Kenya.

## 3.0 Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the position of indigenous languages as a prerequisite tool for democracy in Kenya. This is done by analyzing the strategies employed by the leaders to convey their ideologies and agendas through the indigenous languages having in mind that Kenya is a multilingual society.

## 4.0 Communicative Democracy Theory

Dewey (1916, 1927), Habermas (1984, 1987, and 2018) and Young (1993, 1996) conceptualized Democracy and Communication. In Dewey's view of democracy, communication is the anchor. His conceptions of the social life, communication, and democracy are closely related. Democracy is not just a set of institutional arrangements but is a communicative form of social life. Against an individualistic ethos, Dewey argued for a democracy that has a communal dimension and needs communication of facts and ideas. Coeckelbergh (2024) argues that in a democracy, there needs to be free and open communication between people with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, which leads to both moral growth and democracy as people come

to share concerns and hold more in common. Dewey (1916) insists that democracy is not just a form of government but ‘a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicative experience.’ His emphasis on the importance of communication for democracy is anchored in the conviction that society does not only use communication instrumentally but it exists in communication. Communication is about what we have in common. Supporting social life is in turn necessary since ‘what one is as a person is what one is as associated with others’. He explained that Education should play a key role, where its main aim being a social one and personal growth is seen in that light; one should grow towards seeing common interests. Dewey writes, that instead of pursuing utilitarian ends, education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together. Education should therefore promote interests and insights in the very problem of living together.

Habermas (1984) agrees with Dewey that communication is constitutive for democracy. His deliberative democracy is a development of his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). When people engage in political argumentation and justification regarding the organization of their living together, they engage in argumentative communicative practices. Anyone can take part and introduce challenges, that others must be seen as equals, and that no-one is coerced by others. There is a mutual search for understanding. The so-called “ideal speech situation,” which Habermas also formulated in terms of a ‘discourse ethics,’ derived from the presuppositions of argumentation – a transcendental argument (Habermas, 2018). The ideal speech situation is grounded in communicative action rather than strategic action. If these conditions are not met, a political argument would not be justified in a democracy. He paid more attention to discourse used in different spheres, which Habermas (1987) calls ‘the system’. Language is used to give orders, to bargain, manipulate, etc. In the ‘lifeworld’, by contrast, people try to understand each other and reach consensus. Habermas’s discourse ethics is meant to guide us in achieving communicative action and therefore also in realizing democracy.

Building on Dewey’s (1916, 1927) and Habermas (1984, 1987) ideas Young (1993, 1996) proposed a version of deliberative democratic theory that she calls ‘communicative democracy’ a version of democracy in which communication is understood as including not only argument but also greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling. With ‘greeting’ she refers to communications that aim at recognition, without specific content. Rhetoric, in turn, refers to (and constructs) the particularities of the speaker, audience, and occasion. And narrative helps those who do not share the same experiences to understand the situation of others by exhibiting experience, values, and social knowledge related to a specific social position. Young (1996) refers to it as communicative theory, where communication is understood in a broad and plural sense as ‘any forms of communicative interaction where people aim to reach understanding,’ as well as those that are passionate and emotional.

This study anchored its analysis on communicative theory as expressed Young (1996). The focus being political democracy as democracy in Vernacular (Kymlicka, 2001) hence analyzing how indigenous languages are used by the leaders in Kenya during their public engagements with the citizens.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Language possesses its own dynamics and is constantly undergoing processes of both continuity and change, impacting upon the communication modes of different societies as it evolves. Archibugi (2005) quoting Flaubert (1869) who tells how, during the European riots of 1848, there were people in Paris, the city that had triggered the revolutionary rumble, who posed the problem of finding a language capable of becoming a means of communication for the new Europe: Michel-Evariste-Népomucène Vincent, a former professor, proposes that European democracy adopts a single language: a dead language might come in handy, an updated form of Latin, for example. Latin was widespread throughout Europe, but was always known by the same social classes: aristocrats, intellectuals and priests. In each country, it served to exclude the majority of the population from religious, scientific, civil and political rites. More than French, and certainly more than English or German, Latin brought together the members of the community of letters, but at the cost of excluding the great majority of the population. The Roman Empire was made up of a myriad of tribes, each with its own different language. Prior to “liberal neutrality,” the Romans granted each tribe ample religious and linguistic autonomy, provided they paid tribute and supplied soldiers. To preserve their empire, the Romans would take some of the



most promising sons of aristocratic families' hostage and provide them with education in Latin, without even asking them to pay tuition fees. The young men thus often became go-betweens for collaboration and dominion: to the Romans it was quite clear that, since they were the dominators, their language should therefore be the dominating one. Even though such dilemmas always arises in multilingual set ups, it is important to note that in a democratic society, every voice counts and these voices can be expressed better in a language one identifies with better, and that is their native language.

Starkey (2002) observes that Languages are particularly an important component of cultural heritage. The diversity of languages contributes to the richness of Europe's culture. As one of the fundamental standard-setting instruments, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948 <https://www.un.org/en/aboutus/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>, lays down the basic principle against discrimination on the grounds of language: 'Article 2.: Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as... language. Language is not only a tool used for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group. In any multilingual society, which is evident in most parts of the world, the acknowledgment of languages of persons belonging to these different linguistic communities is the cornerstone to peaceful coexistence. This applies both to majority groups, to minorities (whether traditionally resident in a country or more recent migrants) and to indigenous peoples. The claims for language are among the first rights that minorities have. Such are basic issues to consider if we are to have a progressive democratic society.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) notes that in the language of ecology, the strongest ecosystems are those that are the most diverse. Diversity is directly related to stability; variety is important for long-term survival (Baker, 2001). Understandings of language/linguistic ecology range widely. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) discusses that many researchers use "ecology" as a reference to "context" or "language environment", to describe language-related issues embedded in (micro or macro) sociolinguistic, economic and political settings rather than de-contextualized. Others have more specific definitions and sub-categories (e.g. articles in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Mufwene, 2001; Mühlhäusler, 1996, 2003).

Nevertheless, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) looks at Bio-cultural diversity (= biodiversity + linguistic diversity + cultural diversity) as essential for long term planetary survival because it enhances creativity and adaptability and hence stability. They note that today, we are killing bio- cultural diversity faster than ever before in human history. The seriously endangered languages disappear with little trace, at the same time as other notyet-endangered languages, though official, are undergoing domain loss in high-status areas when English is being extensively used in research, universities, businesses, media, and now even in households etc. Their speakers start experiencing what many minorities have experienced earlier when national official or "big" languages have spread subtractively. The alternative is maximal support for linguistic diversity and additive multilingualism. Basing on these arguments more avenues rather than Education should be encouraged to drum support for the continuous learning and use of the indigenous languages, together with good teaching of an official language as a second language. This will not only present the indigenous languages as a tool for identity, but as something that fights for its space in democracy as well as an enabler of democracy.

Rubio-Marín (2003) explains the two types of language, "the expressive interest in language as a marker of identity" and an "instrumental interest in language as a means of communication". Expressive language rights "aim at ensuring a person's capacity to enjoy a secure linguistic environment in her/his mother tongue and a linguistic group's fair chance of cultural self-reproduction"; He continues to say that it is only these rights that she calls "language rights in a strict sense." These could in other words be seen as linguistic human rights. The instrumental language rights aim at ensuring that language is not an obstacle to the effective enjoyment of rights with a linguistic dimension, to the meaningful participation in public institutions and democratic process, and to the enjoyment of social and economic opportunities that require linguistic skills." Just as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) equated speaking in one's Mother Tongue as speaking from the heart. In the sense that deep and profound issues can be expressed and understood better when spoken in Mother Tongue. This means

that we can't have any meaningful social and economic inclusivity without considering Mother Tongue in all spheres of the human being.

Verhasselt (2025) discusses that the understanding of the relationship between multilingualism and deliberative democracy remains thin. Embracing multilingualism then becomes a fundamental step toward creating a more robust deliberative democratic framework. Whereas language rights and policy are important elements in the ongoing debate concerning multilingualism, the language question must be approached independently. However, her work aimed to first, provide a framework for considering multilingualism in the theory of deliberative democracy. Second, move beyond theory, to explore the practical reconciliation between multilingualism and deliberative democracy by focusing on deliberative mini- publics (DMPs). She looks at multilingualism in the general sense of the word; the use of multiple languages in society. Henceforth, multilingual deliberation is a complex and varied practice that can occur in official and non-official, national multilingual contexts, as well as on the transnational and global levels. Her article does not delve into these different contexts but it analyzes the challenges and opportunities of multilingual democratic deliberation in a broad sense.

Verhasselt (2025) notes that Multilingual DMPs based on a shared understanding are likely to be most effective in official multilingual nations where participants have at least a passive understanding of the other language(s). Examples of such nations include Switzerland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. She explains that the Luxembourgish Biergerkommitee 2050 is an excellent example of a multi lingual deliberative consultative process based on a shared understanding, partially facilitated by state investment in multilingual education. Participants were required to have a passive knowledge of the country's three official languages: Luxembourgish, French, and German. During discussions, members were free to use the language they were most comfortable with, eliminating the need for translation. This language- neutral environment was appreciated by both participants and moderators, who claimed that the multilingual aspect of the deliberation worked well. Many even argued that the use of multilingualism was a plus and added more value to the deliberations (Verhasselt et al., 2024).

Ferguson and Sidorova (2023) agreeing with the ideas of Viatori and Ushigua (2007) that many indigenous nations have successfully used their languages as tools for uniting their communities, fostering indigenous identity, and defining the boundaries of their self-determination hence the ability of indigenous nations to make decisions about their identity, religion, culture, economy, and legal system without interference from external actors. They assert that Indigenous languages are important tools for stressing the cultural and historical uniqueness of indigenous communities as well as indigenous peoples' cultural distinctness from non-indigenous governments. Indigenous leaders have stressed this uniqueness when arguing for the establishment of greater indigenous sovereignty, as well as special rights for indigenous persons and communities. However, Viatori and Ushigua illustrates these by exploring the role that indigenous languages have played in advancing indigenous self-determination in the Americas. Specifically, by discussing how the Zápara nationality of Ecuador used their language to petition for greater administrative and cultural autonomy from Ecuador's government. The revitalization of the Zápara language also has been an invaluable platform from which the Zápara leader have been able to gain recognition and support from Ecuador's national indigenous movement, international support networks, and the state, which have provided valuable resources for the augmentation of local Zápara selfdetermination. Using examples from the Zápara, they demonstrate that indigenous languages can be a vital component of strengthening communities' and individually' identification with an indigenous language. This paper, shows that the strengths embodied in indigenous languages cannot be wished away. They have an integral role in the understanding of any individual and community as well as a tool for negotiating where it matters, and for that matter expanding the democratic space.

Kymlicka (2001) democratic politics is politics in the vernacular. The average citizen feels at ease only when he discusses political questions in his own language. As a general rule, only elites are fluent in more than one language and feel at ease discussing political questions in different languages in a multilingual atmosphere. Moreover, political communication has a large ritual component and these ritual forms of communication are characteristic of a language. Even if a person understands a foreign language in the technical sense, he may be incapable of understanding political debates, if he has no knowledge of these ritual elements. For these and other reasons, we can believe, as a general rule, that the more the political debate takes place in the vernacular,

the greater the participation and the more the freedoms of individual and group needs are communicated and by extension taken into consideration. It is not possible to ignore the fact that, albeit with some difficulty, democracy has managed to solve problems of linguistic communication. On the basis of these premises, how must democratic practice be modified to deal with the existence of multilingual political communities? To think that, in order to survive, democracy requires specific linguistic conditions is to underestimate its versatility and its capacity to evolve. To master a universal language is not to relinquish the language of one's own ethnic group.

However, the dissenting voices and assumptions argue that democracy requires a single language is not new. The idea dates to the ancient Greeks who believed that non-Greek speakers were barbarians and incapable but also forbidden from partaking in the Athenian democratic political scene. John Stuart Mill expressed his view over 160 years ago that a shared public opinion cannot exist if citizens 'read and speak different languages' (Mill, 1998 [1861], p. 428). Several other authors share in this sentiment that linguistic pluralism is a hindrance to democracy because it is regarded as complicating the establishment of a public sphere, perceived as a necessary condition for democracy.

Doerr (2009, 2012) and Sebane, Z. & Zitouni (2018) explains that multilingual settings have an increased risk of misunderstandings. Although, relations between language communities can be a source of tension and misunderstanding within and between nations, the achievement of collaboration in multilingual communities is a demonstration of the possibility of success of democracy and may be considered exemplary of the very essence of democracy. Although language is sometimes perceived as a sign of difference, the linguistic capacities of human beings are a unifying feature, distinguishing humans from other species and bringing with them an automatic entitlement to human rights. Despite this Baker (2001) reminds us that cultural diversity is strength. Kenya's diverse linguistic landscape is its' strength as every community has distinct space to express their freedoms.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the position of indigenous languages as a prerequisite of democracy in Kenya. This paper systematically reviews related research on language, indigenous language and democracy. Guided by the tenets of communicative theory by Young (1996) where communication is understood as including not only argument but also greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling. Purposive sampling was done on various public gatherings where indigenous languages were used by different political leaders to communicate to the audience. The content was analyzed to find out the strategies that were used by the political leaders to overcome the linguistic obstacle that is possibly brought about by the linguistic diversity in Kenya. The political leaders were purposively sampled because in this case they are considered champion democracy in Kenya. The data was searched on You –tube and collected from various meetings to a point of saturation. The strategies used were then organized thematically; greetings, rhetoric and storytelling. Using content analysis, the data was discussed and the results presented. As a result, this study shed light on the different strategies employed by leaders using indigenous languages as a prerequisite to democracy in Kenya.

## 7.0 Findings and Discussion

Guided by the tenets of communicative theory by Young (1996) where communication is understood as including not only argument but also greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling, the public gatherings purposively sampled included the political rallies, funerals, and impromptu meet ups. One leader who stood out to have used indigenous languages in every community that he had to address a gathering was the Prime Minister of Kenya, The Right Honourable Raila Amollo Odinga; as displayed in the following recordings;

Data 1: <https://youtu.be/4ojxA2LHgPY?feature=shared>

From the Oval Compilation video – showing that the Right honourable could speak more than 10 languages – Evidence by the greetings in Luo, Kikuyu, Luhya, Turkana, Kikamba, Somali, Maasai

Data 2: [https://youtu.be/2k-OEtRS\\_EM?si=u653sd39YRP36qiD](https://youtu.be/2k-OEtRS_EM?si=u653sd39YRP36qiD) Kalenjin greetings

Data 3: [https://youtu.be/OKtRCtv6ryM?si=5lskHUcvtSW1sLM\\_](https://youtu.be/OKtRCtv6ryM?si=5lskHUcvtSW1sLM_) Luhya song

Data 4: [https://youtu.be/u\\_B-VLhw\\_Ww?si=4NYjIL4bEQjVpiBL](https://youtu.be/u_B-VLhw_Ww?si=4NYjIL4bEQjVpiBL) Kikuyu

greetings [https://youtu.be/hj-a\\_T8hY\\_4?si=8cNmXV-MLZW4sNwq](https://youtu.be/hj-a_T8hY_4?si=8cNmXV-MLZW4sNwq)

Luo dirge during a burial in the Kalenjin community The data sampled above shows how he used greetings to communicate. These greetings were a strategy of fulfilling various social functions geared towards promoting the democratic space in Kenya as discussed below; First, greetings in the indigenous languages were used to establish rapport and connection with the people in the community. The people in the different communities roared enthusiastically and became livelier as he used their language, for example like in the case of his speech in Data 2. He spoke in Kalenjin while his indigenous language is Luo. A warm and inclusive greeting helps the speaker connect with the audience on a personal level. This makes the attendees feel acknowledged and valued, fostering trust which makes the audience more receptive to the speaker's message. This enhances inclusivity which contributes to broader social cohesion, which is an important tenet of peace and development in a diverse society as well as an important indicator of democracy (Dewey, 1927). Moreover, as a national figure, his use of the indigenous languages to set the pace of his interaction with people at any particular time brought in a sense of inclusivity in the affairs of the Nation.

Second, the use of the greetings from the indigenous language making reference to shared experiences or values creates a sense of shared identity and belonging among the group. This is vital in uniting a political base around a common cause or party, building solidarity and a sense of community. This strategy is vital in that he acknowledged that despite their linguistic diversity, they are united by the democratic values they share which strengthened their political base. Without these gestures of respect and inclusion, political discussion can break down into mere power struggles, where participants refuse to listen to one another as equals, ultimately undermining the democratic process itself.

Addressing the audience using local languages by the Right honorable Raila was a sign of legitimacy, authenticity and suitability as a representative. For instance he used Maasai language when addressing the Maasai community, Kalenjin for Kalenjin Community, Kamba language for Kamba community, basic Luhya greetings considering the different Luhya dialects and every other community he interacted with to signal that he was "one of them" and hence gained legitimacy, even if he didn't understand much of the language itself. This solidly showed that we can transcend our linguistic differences defined by our geographical locations to embrace each other as Kenyans. However, it also establishes equality and respect; Greetings are communicative gestures through which individuals recognize the presence, worth, and equal standing of others as participants in the democratic process. This is vital for ensuring all voices are considered and preventing internal exclusion, where some participants might otherwise be ignored or dismissed especially on the basis of language. An act that is considered undemocratic by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

He used the indigenous languages greetings to gauge the audience reaction and engagement. The audience's response to a greeting (e.g., applause, cheers, verbal response) provides immediate feedback, allowing the speaker to gauge the crowd's mood and adjust their presentation accordingly. It also eases tensions and foster an environment of cooperation, even among parties with conflicting interests. Mature democracy gives room for People to differ ideologically but still work together (Asiko, Odoyo and Amukowa, 2013). Democracy doesn't mean agreeing to everything people do and say politically but it also doesn't mean fighting all the time. While attending the functions in his political opponent's communities, he used their indigenous greetings to set the tone and norms by establishing the level of formality and the rules of interaction for the event. A formal greeting in a diplomatic setting helps avoid distractions and ensures proceedings run smoothly, while an informal greeting aimed at creating a more passionate and personal atmosphere.



Moreover, the indigenous languages greetings is a strategy of creating expectations of future engagements. The greetings were used, as an initial act of communication and goodwill, setting expectations for future interactions, such as promises of future actions or ongoing relationships with the political representatives. As it has been displayed in Raila's political journey, there is no permanent enemy but only different political perspectives, which can offer ground for collaboration for the greater good of the people. It is also a powerful symbolic gestures that acknowledge the legitimacy of other groups or nations as dialogue partners, even if substantial disagreements remain.

Nevertheless, the greetings as a strategy of identifying and acknowledging the community as part of the people of Kenya, in that the linguistic community cannot and should not isolate one from the larger community of being a Kenyan. This manages relationships and hierarchies as communicates or acknowledges social status and power dynamics between the speaker and various individuals or groups within the audience as members of a particular linguistic community before belonging to the wider Kenyan community where the National language, Kiswahili is used as an identity language. Understanding social status and power dynamics as expressed by Bourdieu (1992) is key for the meaningful interaction of both individuals and the communities represented by the individuals.

The greetings are also a strategy of opening lines of communication that have remained closed. This offers a platform for people to engage in discussions and work towards shared solutions. It also a strategy to facilitate dialogue across diverse societies with different values and experiences. The formal or informal greetings act as a starting point for dialogue, helping to bridge cultural or social divides by creating an initial moment of shared connection before bringing up controversial political arguments.

In addition, the indigenous language greeting used by Hon. Raila was a strategy of politeness to show that he belonged to the group and he shared in the emotions at hand and he shared in their loss (if in grief) or gains (in happiness), depending on the purpose of the gathering.

The second Strategy of the indigenous languages was through the use of rhetoric. In a democracy, the rhetorical use of indigenous languages is a powerful tool for promoting inclusive political participation, building national unity through cultural identity, and ensuring effective local governance. Politicians use indigenous languages to connect with the electorate on a personal and emotional level during campaigns. By employing traditional proverbs, culturally resonant phrases, and local idioms, they build trust and gain support among specific ethnic or regional groups. Using Kiswahili, which is a national language in his rhetoric was an intentional strategy meant to bring all Kenyans to the understanding of whatever scenario that he was communicating. His speech opening style of '*hayaaa, hayaaa...*' transcended linguistic barriers. It was his identity of a nationalist, who was ready to interact with everyone irrespective of one's language or social formation. The Right honorable Raila Amollo Odinga used several figures of speech not just to catch the attention of his audience but to prepare them emotionally for the fight for their democratic space. He uses slogans and rallying Cries like "*Tialala!*" and "*Jowi!*" (Buffalo in Luo), "*Unbwogable*" (Can't be defeated) - Rallying cries used to express resilience and mark emotional, powerful moments during speeches. Others in Swahili includes;

*"Mapambano!"* (Struggle) symbolizing the ongoing struggle for justice and democracy.

*"Haki yetu!"* (Our Rights) A direct demand for fairness and justice that resonated with his supporters during protests and rallies. A call for a democratic space and privileges for all. A call that shows concern and understanding to everyone's privileges in the society that seems to be ignored by the very people that should care and implement where necessary.

*"Mambo bado"* (The Struggle is not yet over) A phrase used to remind supporters that the political struggle and the fight for change were far from over.

*"Punda amechoka"* ("The donkey is tired"), a slogan that spoke to the exhaustion of millions of Kenyans carrying the burden of corruption, poor governance, poor service delivery while paying taxes, issues that define democracy.

### Metaphors and Analogies

*"Safari ya Canaan"* Journey to Canaan" - A prominent biblical allusion reflecting his vision of a just and prosperous Kenya, with his supporters as the Israelites on a journey to the Promised Land, a land full of blessings, where justice is served equally to all.

Football Commentary; He often used extended metaphors from football (soccer) in his speeches, describing political maneuvers, passing the "ball" to different coalition partners, and ultimately scoring a "goal" (winning the election) to make complex political dynamics relatable and entertaining to the masses.

Riddles and Proverbs; He incorporated traditional oral literature, such as riddles (*vitendawili*), to engage the crowd, discredit opponents, and present his own character. An example is using the "night runner" riddle to explain how his opponents stole the election in the dark, only to be exposed by daylight.

*"Raila ni mweupe kama pamba"* ("Raila is as white as a cotton wool"), a self-referential metaphor to portray himself as untainted by corruption, injustices and other ethical issues unlike his opponents.

"War" Metaphors making reference to the various freedom fighters like Koitalel arap Samoei, Mekatilili wa Menza and others from different communities as well as referring to the tales of the heroes like Lwanda Magere, Nabongo Mumia, who had powers that specific communities could relate with. He frequently framed politics or elections as a "war" or "battle" to convey the high stakes and a sense of urgency to his audience.

### Thematic Rhetoric

Identity and Ideology His speeches often used emotive language to create a clear "in-group" (his supporters and allies) versus "out-group" (opponents and the "establishment") dynamic, reinforcing a shared identity and ideology of liberation and reform.

National Unity and Forgiveness Despite a long history of political struggle and perceived betrayals, he often used the Swahili proverb *"Yaliyopita si ndwele, tugange yajayo"* ("Bygones are bygones; let us focus on the future") to emphasize the need for national unity and a forward-looking perspective.

Populist and Anti-Establishment Language; His rhetoric consistently positioned him as a champion of the poor and marginalized against a corrupt elite or "cartels" that were allegedly looting the nation's resources.

Songs sung in different communities that resonated with his ideologies of fighting for a just and democratic society were part and parcel of his speeches (Data 3). *"Lero lero ni lero, avolanga mkamba no muvei"* (Today is today, whoever talks of tomorrow is a liar) This song implies the preparedness of the leadership together with the people to bring about the much needed change to build an inclusive government.

He also used narrations to point out injustices and cry for inclusivity amongst Kenyans despite their social backgrounds. Hon. Raila narrated focusing on the heroes of various indigenous communities (refer to war metaphors above) as a way of acknowledging as well as embracing the different cultures.

### CONCLUSION

Citizens in a democracy need intercultural and communicative democratic skills for living in communities where multilingualism and cultural diversity is the norm. They need critical cultural awareness to understand the world around them and enhance justice, social inclusion and mutual understanding. Communication democracy as explained by Young (1996) is evident of how greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling are vital strategies through indigenous languages to enhance democracy. The above discussion shows that greetings are

highly strategic components of political communication, serving as a form of "micro-diplomacy" to manage relationships, build support, and make the audience more receptive to the overarching political message. In democratic participation it is a strategy that fosters an inclusive environment by establishing mutual respect, trust, and acknowledgement among diverse participants. These also amplifies the fact that no vernacular language is minor or major, in a democratic everyone matters. Rhetoric and storytelling, especially in vernacular, brings all the people to appreciate an intimate experience which brings out a deeper understanding of each other. This is pivotal, in serving justice and freedom through the use of indigenous language which is at the heart of the people concerned and ultimately all. Appreciation of indigenous languages in a multilingual society by our leaders actually is a prerequisite.

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