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## Developing a New Language for a New Culture in a Distressed Economy: A Zimbabwean Experience

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### **Abstract:**

*This study was concerned about an investigation into a new reality in Zimbabwe's institutional environment that has seen the proliferation of corruption and political violence. Typically, they enhance each other. The researcher was guided by four objectives: (i) To generate a catalogue of language instruments which reflect a culture of corruption; (ii) To identify a range of language instruments which show a culture of violence (iii) To provide a literal and contextual translation of the words and (iv) To determine the overall implications of the vocabulary for the underlying culture. The results showed that physical violence was the most frequent word used in the new reality and bribe was the most common theme in the area of corruption. These outcomes revealed the nature of the underlying culture under a new reality which was born out of unethical government practice stretching over long years in Zimbabwe from 1995 to 2015.*

**Keywords:** Culture language of violence, language of corruption, language of greed, language of election

### **1. Introduction**

This study is based on the role played by organisational leadership in the development of organisational culture. This is done with a specific focus on the City of Harare, which is the study site. The organisation, like most in Zimbabwe had been affected by a deep-seated challenge of corruption which was maintained by a complex web of intimidation and force.

### **2. Study Background**

The vast majority of the people got involved in corruption during a time when the economic situation deteriorated and people could not have enough to get by. However, while the economy was suffering in general, a major challenge was that the leadership was at the centre of the corruption and violence that took place.

Corruption "poses a serious threat to public administration and has often resulted in inefficient provision of services" (Sithole, 2013). Kotter (2007) notes that public officials develop a huge propensity to commit acts of corruption when they realise that they are not being monitored. According to Wafawarova (2011), politicians typically try to maximise in primitive accumulation of wealth due to the uncertainty about their limited tenure in office.

In 2011, a Commonwealth Report made an observation that there is no unified and consistent framework for the use of indigenous language (Commonwealth Ombudsman, 2011). Similarly, in the context of the education system, it is quite difficult to use content from indigenous languages to conduct empirical studies. This is because the indigenous languages are not incorporated into mainstream languages of instruction. Thus, the researcher seeks to be innovative by collecting data and revealing the patterns of the underlying culture.

### **3. Objectives of Study**

- To generate a catalogue of language instruments which reflect a culture of corruption
- To identify a range of language instruments which show a culture of violence
- To provide a literal and contextual translation of the words
- To determine the overall implications of the vocabulary for the underlying culture

### **4. Conceptual Framework**

This study is based on an important observation made by a media practitioner, Isaac Mpofu (Southern Eye of February 21, 2014) who postulated that language can be construed as a facet of culture; the language is a reflection of the culture in which it is spoken. This therefore means that language is a carrier of culture.

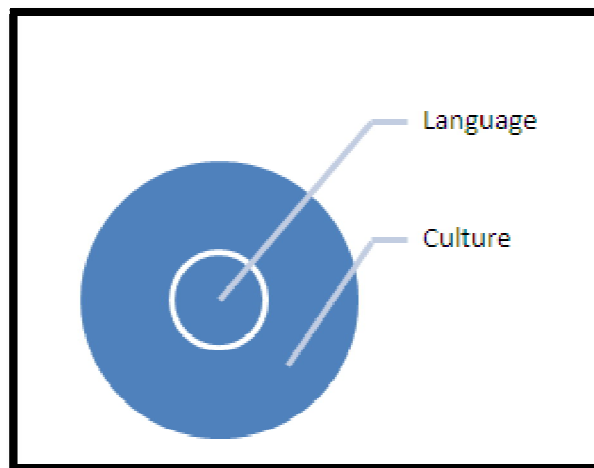


Figure 1: Language Carries Culture

Thus, an analysis of the language that emerged within the institutional framework of Harare Municipality can reveal the fundamental nature of the political and socio-economic statuses of the people operating in that particular culture. Whereas the true purpose of language is to communicate, all peoples have developed their convention of communication, that is to say, that each language has developed a common and acceptable way of communicating. Therefore, language consists in the use of appropriate cultural vocabulary. The real issue in this expose is to uncover and decode a new language that has come about in expressing the advent of a new culture, a new reality in Zimbabwe from 1995 to date.

## 5. Literature Review

"Rampant corruption has seen widespread local resource wastage and inefficiency in local authorities in Zimbabwe (Dewa, Dziva and Mukwashi, 2014:192). Kunaka et al. (2002:11) define corruption as a deviation from formal public protocols and duties for private financial gains. As a result of various dimensions of corruption, many of Zimbabwe's urban councils had become dysfunctional due to highly inefficient levels of service delivery (Wekwete, 2006)

Typical signs of inefficient service delivery included extended periods of non-collection of garbage which became a breeding ground for all sorts of vermin like mosquitoes and flies which led to the proliferation of communicable diseases like malaria and cholera (Masocha and Tevera, 2003).

In the transport sector, taxi and commuter omnibus operators do not respect the designated zones when picking passengers. This makes it quite difficult to manage traffic (Mahlahla, 2007). Several investigations end up dying out because the authorities who are involved in regulating the transport own a lot of the illegal taxis.

In these and other types of corruption, typically the political muscle which was involved in entrenching the corruption would preserve the disorder because they benefitted from it. As corruption has proliferated in Zimbabwe's urban councils, the responsible politicians have shown a reluctance to remove and replace office bearers who have been involved in corruption or have been incompetent (Mumvuma et al., 2006). Thus, political interference has had negative repercussions for service delivery (Bell, 2002) in any institutional context.

## 6. Methodology

The researcher used a naturalistic ethnographic design for the purposes to gain information for this paper. Researchers become intimately involved with the respondents (Heppner et al 1992) throughout this investigation, collecting data by means of observations.

The researcher chose to use the method of participant observation. Between 2012 and 2015, the researcher began a benchmarking and categorization of specific words which had developed solely due to the conditions and dynamics which were prevailing in the organization. While there were many words which denoted the underlying culture, the researcher chose to capture those words which were frequently recurring and carrying more or less the same meaning. Because it is unconventional language, it is difficult sometimes to get exactly the same language structure.

## 7. Exposing the Evolving Language

The study has managed to decode a new language that has been derived from the new reality and the new culture in Zimbabwe between the period 2012 to 2015. It is divided into four groups namely, the language of corruption, language of greed, language of violence and language of election. It is important to note that language carries a people's culture.

Term/Phrase	Meaning in Context
1. Political reorientation	Beating up people who hold different political views from the ruling party so that they are whipped into line
2. Huya nayetimushandire	Bring him here so that we can give him a thorough beating
3. Door-to-door campaigning	Commandeering, beating up people with different political ideas from the ruling party
4. Kugezera munhunyaya/kuzoramumwe	Blame shifting to soft targets
5. Jambanja	Forcible occupation of a farm/company and sending the owner away without any compensation
6. Hovhiyo	Violent attack with the intention to cause physical pain
7. Mabororo	Physical fight between two political parties
8. Vakamutsa maoko	They fought
9. Vakaitwa wastak	They were beaten up
10. Chabvondoka	People are being beaten
11. Pakaita noise	There was a fight, a commotion resulting in injury to people or their property
12. Dzidzisa vanhu	Beat people up to coerce them into line
13. Endai munovaudzawara remusangano	Beat people so that they are aligned to the ruling party
14. Kumutsa maoko	To fight
15. Torai munhu	Beat him!
16. Batai munhu	Beat the man up

Table 1: Language of Violence

Among the most recurrent themes are (i) Beating (10/16 or 62.5%; (ii) Fighting (4/16 or 25%) and then (iii) Blame shifting to weaker targets (1/16 or 6.25%) (iv) forcible farm occupation (1/16 or 6.25%)

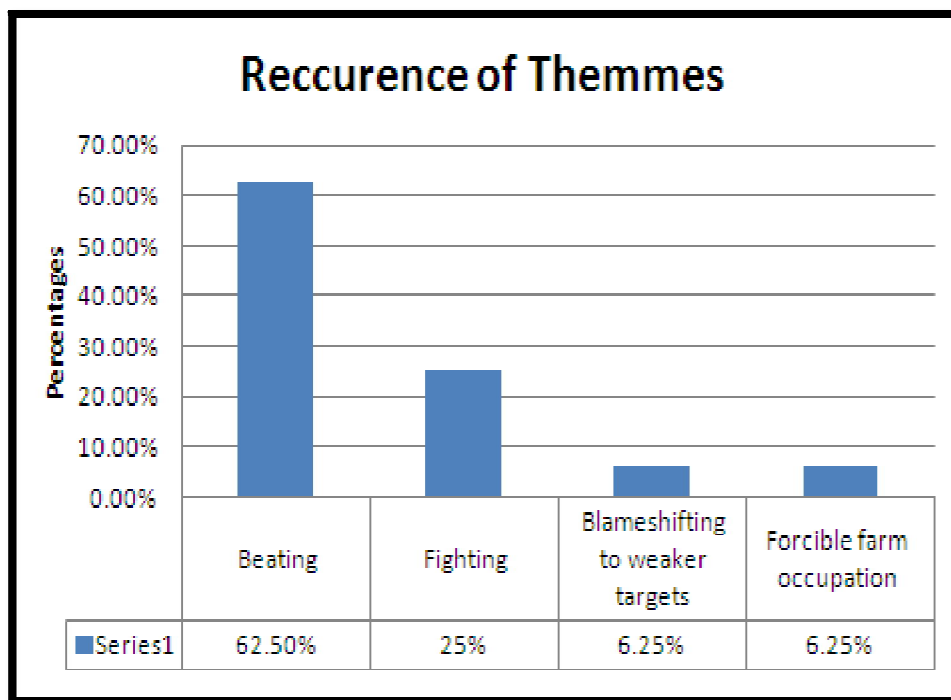


Figure 2: Recurrence of Themes

Thus, it is visible from the reflection revealed by a thematic analysis of the diction in popular language with the new culture that had sprouted in Harare's institutions with the particular case of the City of Harare.

This section is concerned about the language of corruption.

Term/Phrase	Meaning in Context
1. Make a plan	An invitation to bribe
2. Coke yacho	Demand for a bribe
3. Ndipewo padiki	Demand for a bribe
4. Chebasa	Demand for a bribe
5. Toitasei	Invitation for a bribe
6. Ndokubasa kwangu	Such a corrupt activity is my area of expertise
7. Kutonyora	To bribe
8. Kudusa	Being generous in bribing
9. Zviwanikwa	Accessibility to goods and services corruptly obtained
10. Kashiri kamambo	Spy agent for the corrupt boss
11. Who do you know?	The question is suggestive of any corrupt connections at the top
12. Unoziva kuti ndakauya nani here pano pabasa?	Threat indicative of corrupt higher powers that facilitated his/her employment
13. Ari kuseri kwangu	Threat indicative of corrupt higher powers that facilitated his/her employment
14. Tinozvigadzirisira	That's not a big deal we will fix it
15. Tamba irikurira iyoyo usazvinetse	If you can't beat them, join them
16. Zvavharana	It's tit-for-tat
17. Hapana dhiri	No deal
18. Uri chivharo	You are dishonest in your dealings
19. Wakandinyudza	In a deal gone wrong you will have incurred serious loss

Table 2: Language of Corruption

The most recurrent themes were (i) bribe (6/19 or roughly 32%); (ii) High Office Corruption (3/19 or roughly 16%); (iii) Dishonesty (2/19 or rough 10.5%) and others (8/19 or roughly 42%). These are illustrated in the section below.

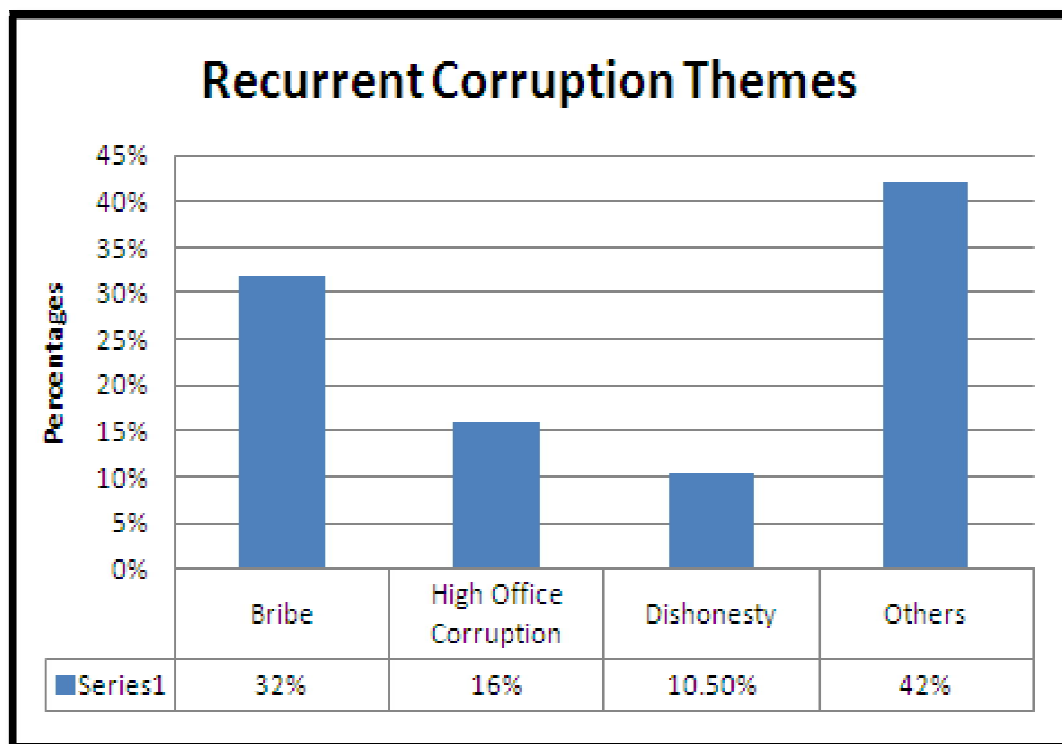


Figure 3: Recurrent Corruption Themes

Bribe dominates all other forms of expression of corruption. Thus, this marks the need of the section on data presentation for the thematic analysis of the language and diction that is prevalent in the new institutional culture prevailing in organisations.

## 8 Conclusions

The most salient outcome of both the corruption and violence is that it was sanctioned in a majority of the cases from top to bottom. Leadership in various positions of government were frequently involved in corruption and so could not control the corruption which took place below their ranks. In many cases, the corruption was just cascaded from the top to the bottom with the bigger powers being the ones to benefit the most.

The subject of corruption and violence can be very sensitive to study. If one goes around asking about such incidences, they would easily get victimised, particularly during the tense political environment such as the one prevailing in Zimbabwe. However, collecting a set of words and phrases is relatively safe and does not target any person. The words which have been collected are free of any blame on anyone but instead are just portraying the character of the underlying culture that has generated the evolution of these words.

## 9. Recommendations

- There should be ethics committees and procedures which clearly state that certain types of graft by leadership like nepotism should be prosecuted by independent board level officials so that it does not continue to be unchecked.
- There should be a clear distinction between the political offices and the institutes of public administration. There should not be any overlap and should be prosecuted when it has been found.
- Public institutions should have open lines of whistle-blowing which operate on an anonymous basis in order to prevent the victimisation of whistle-blowers.
- There should be leadership change in periodic intervals in order to prevent incumbent leaders from entrenching deep-seated practices of corruption over long periods of time.

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