

Analysis of the Persuasive Strategies in the 2006 State of the Nation's Address

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Abstract

This current study focuses on the rhetorical strategies used in Ghana's 2016 state of the nations address. Using the rhetoric theory, the 64 pages original address presented by the president of Ghana was analyzed. The analysis revealed the use of identification with the audience, acknowledgement and linguistic resources such as transitivity, modality and persuasive narratives with the aim of persuading the audience to give him a second chance in office as a president of Ghana. In all the speech revealed the speaker as credible and development minded. The paper has implication for further research since the current study could not exhaust all there is in the speech.

Keywords: *Persuasion, State of the Nation's Address, Ghana, Rhetoric's, Communication*

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Background to the Study

“The state of the nation's address” in Ghanaian context, does not simply inform the nationals on the current unfolding of events. Rather it is a holistic communication that covers the past (What was done) the present (what is being done) and the future (what is likely to be done) by the government if given a second term (Klinogo, 2016). One of the principal aims of the presenter of such address is to persuade the populace to see clear difference in his (the speaker's) tenure of office and the previous ones so as to make an informed decision by voting the speaker into power the second time. A characteristic of such a presentation is the special use of linguistic forms that appeal to the audience. On the 25th of February 2016, the president of the Republic of Ghana presented a 64 pages (double spacing, New Time Romans) address to the nation. The core areas addressed are education, health, agriculture, social protection, security etc. (Klinogo, 2016). Apart from the specific contents that matter to the audience, the language form used in the presentation counts to a greater degree as its persuasiveness has caused the audience to pay attention to even the very specific details being presented. The taste of the speech is of major concern to this research because of the gloomy state of the nation prior to the presentation of this address.

Comparing the achievements of the current government to the problems noted during the tenure of office, one finds that there has been a major economic down drop in the system. The regime is said to display a lot of incompetence in handling normal issues. In the words of Gyampoh (2015)

“ This government has suffered severe crisis over the past two years, ranging from the economic situation, the power crisis and various corruption cases...when we talk about governance we are simply talking about demonstrations, and protests that are not politically motivated”.

Similar observation was made by the council of world Bishops thus

“Mahama's achievements might go unrecognized if the prevailing economic hardship continues. We seem to be in hard times economically; the load shedding, the erratic power supply is having such a retrogressive effect on our economic activities coupled with the increases in taxes.” (Cite F.M online, January, 2015)

The Private Enterprise Federation (PEF) described the year as the most difficult year for business across the country (Efe-Ansah, Cite News January, 2015). Afro barometer indicated in 2014 that 76% of the citizens blamed government for failing to improve their lives. Aside various economic challenges, the year 2014 recorded number of corrupt scandals including the payment of over 7 million Ghana cedes to non-existent National Service Personnel's, (Efe-Ansah, Cite News January, 2015), the judicial fraud and alleged misappropriation of national resource took Ghana to a debt of 25.6 billion dollars in December 2015 (Daily Graphics, 21st, March 2016). Being a living witness of the situation the researcher testifies that this is the reality of the national image of Ghana as at 2014, two years into the John Mahama led administration. The nation was disgruntled.

It was against this background that the president presented the state of the nation's address. As the name suggest, it is expected of the presenter to speak to all the above issues of concern to the nation. How will he have the moral energy to stand before millions of

disgruntled people to present the address? How will he still convince such a people to vote for him the next term? The above condition notwithstanding, news reporters indicated that millions of citizens were glued to their televisions sets listening to the 4 hours, 64 pages speech. Granting the speaker a four hour audience is a good beginning of the persuasive effect of the speech on the audience and consequently their yieldingness to vote the speaker into power a second term. How was he able to get the disgruntled people listened to him for 4 hours? A careful analysis of the address reveals that the president used some rhetorical devices which are the focus of the current research. Specifically, the study seeks to

1. Investigate the relationship between the address delivered and the possible willingness of the audience to vote the speaker into power a second term.
2. Investigate the persuasive techniques employed by the speaker to convince the audience to vote the speaker for a second term.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section, will review works done in the field of persuasive discourse as used in communication. The purpose of the review is to situate the current work in extant literature on rhetoric.

Persuasive Speeches

Cirugeda & Ruiz (2012) studied the rhetoric in Obama's migration speeches. His aim was to find out the persuasive items that characterized his two speeches. The two speeches were analyzed using the political discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, conceptual metaphor and corpus approach to Metaphor Analysis. It was found out that the speeches were characterized by appeals to political movements, justice, acknowledgements and etc. Sharif & Abdullah (2014) reviewed a body of research on ceremonial speeches of Mother Theresa and the genre of persuasive effect in the speeches. The analysis shows that the speeches were characterized by rhetorical proofs, figures of speeches and speech acts (directives, assertive and representatives). Crick (2014) wrote on the rhetorical public speaking. He asserted that the rhetorical speaking is to transform a collection of disparate individuals to committed hearers. He discovered that the tools of rhetoric's include the rhetoric appeals (ethos, pathos and logos) and the rhetorical situation. He cited the works of Thomas Jefferson, Walt Whitman, Henry David and etc. as exemplary speeches of rhetoric. He concluded that the easiest way to conceptualize the three media of rhetoric communication (written, electronic, and public speaking) is to consider their function in multilayered persuasive campaigns. As far as we are concern the works studied above parallel our work only to the extent that they are all in the domain of persuasion. Cirugeda & Ruiz (2012) came the closest to our domain of presidential speech, however, the different themes and different contexts of the two speeches could result in different findings. Our choice of rhetoric theory is no indication of its academic purity. On the contrary, it has received some criticisms as presented in the next part.

Concept of Rhetoric

Studies in persuasive speaking basically requires exploration of the art of rhetoric (Adegoju, 2011). Aristotle defines rhetoric as the faculty of discerning the possible means of persuasion. The speech according to Aristotle can produce persuasion either through the character of the speaker (ethos), the emotional state of the listener (pathos) or the logical arguments evoked in the speech (Rapp,2002). As a development of the Aristotelian

concept of rhetoric, Campbell (1997) developed the traditional rhetoric which reasons from an ontological perspective in indicating that man is capable of and subject to persuasion because he is a logical reasoning being. By man's natural constitution, therefore, he is able to reason out the choices placed before him. By referring to reason, traditional rhetoric argues that the audience is not a passive robot to be remote-controlled by the speaker. True persuasion therefore depends on the capacity to conceptualize alternatives and to make judgment on which one is most consistent and valid (Campbell, 1977). Of course there are various criticisms along this line. Principal among them is that traditional rhetoric cannot provide basis from which to scrutinize all persuasive use of language (Lauer, 2004). This argument indicates that persuasion could occur even in situation where reasons do not apply. However, we think in a genuine communicative and intelligent context like the presentation of the state of the nation's address one needs not only reason but concrete proofs to persuade the nationals. In what follows, we will present the methodology.

Methodology

This section describes the data source, data collection procedure and the analytical framework adopted for the study.

Data, Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

The major source of data for this study is the 64 pages, double spacing, 2.0 font size, Time New Romans text-form of the state of the nation's address presented by the president of Ghana. The text form of the speech is retrieved from the website www.google.com, on the 5th January, 2016. A detailed reading of the text was done to note the rhetoric devices used. The devices were then categorized into sub classes to suit the space needed for the current study. We adopt the acronym SONA to represent State of the Nation's Address. The acronym SONA and the page of the address that is quoted is placed at the end of quotations made from the address and page number of the address where quotations are made from the address. A copy of the full address is added as an annex to the work.

Method of Analysis

The current study uses mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative methods). The qualitative aspect helped in providing illustrative text samples to support assertions while the quantitative dimension enabled us to present tables and figures to facilitate understanding of the work. Also Aristotle's (1926) rhetoric and its further development by Campbell (1977) and Lauer (2004) as analyzed above was very useful to us. It served as the main analytical framework with which the data was analyzed.

Discussion

Our analysis revealed that the president adopted some important rhetoric strategies in his quest of persuading the audience. These are identification strategies, acknowledgement strategies, and language forms such as transitivity and narrative forms as examples.

Identification Strategies

This has to do with how a speaker tries to establish his or her affinity to the audience (Klinogo, 2015, 2016). Identification technique used in the address includes deictic forms such as "we and our". The deictic pronoun "we" was used 176 times while "our" was used 156 times. "We" and "our" were used pronominally to indicate the inclusion of the speaker

in three fold categories namely: government, family, humans, and politicians. The following are some examples:

Extract 1:

We politicians are known for talking a lot, yet the irony of such a stereotype is that in actual fact, words often fail us. They fail to convey the numerous ways in which what we are doing is directly impacting the lives of those we are serving. And that is because we speak in ways that sometimes take the very subjects of our concerns and turn them into objects, or place them in demographics, or speak of them as statistics. We detail projects and proposals, we cite budgets and data, figures and bottom lines that can feel very far removed from the flesh and blood realities of the people whose lives we seek to improve. (SONA, p. 2-3)

Extract 1 is from the state of the nation's address. The speaker identifies himself with the audience by using the third person plural form of the pronoun “we”. The pronoun replaces certain persons, including the speaker. From the context, the speaker refers to the attitude of politicians who are betrayed by how they communicate their contribution to the progress of human life. The speaker genuinely and sincerely acknowledges himself as one of them. The persuasive import of this identification and acknowledgement is that the audience would naturally prefer a leader who is sincere and genuine to acknowledge his short comings no matter how bad to the one that hypocritically defends himself. In other situations the president communicates himself as a family member to the audience as in the following extract.

Extract 2:

It pains me today to see the vacant seat of our brother, my friend, Honorable J.B. Danquah-Adu, MP for Abuakwa North. J.B., aged 50, when he was brutally murdered, was a gentle man who walked away from every conversation with a smile [...] We have lost a member of our family. And Ghana has lost a true son, one who would no doubt have gone on to contribute greatly to the betterment of our nation. (SONA, p.2)

In extract 2, the speaker talks about the late M.P, J.B Danquah. The use of “our brother, my friend”, “we”, and “our family” does not only show close acquaintance and association of the speaker with the departed person, but also reveals him as a family member who is dearly loved. The extract is loaded with emotive elements such as “pains” “brutally murdered” and “smile”. These elements communicate the inner feelings which the speaker shares with the bereaved family. Again, the speaker reveals himself as just human as others, he feel what they feel. He feels for them in their pains and sorrows. The persuasiveness of extract 2 is that even though the speaker possesses a higher power than the audience, he is able to step down into their 'lower world' and relate with them as mere and ordinary humans. In another instance the president identifies with the audience as a citizen of Ghana.

Extract 3

We continue to invest heavily in the sector to ensure an even better system because [...]we believe that a healthy people make a wealthy nation. [...]we have invested over US\$2billion in health infrastructure, equipment and

human resource. We project to add 6,000 more beds to Ghana's existing stock by the end of 2018 when the programme is completed.

In extract 3, the speaker addresses the health sector. The “we” used in the extract refers to the government who is working to improve the health status of the nationals. The image constructed of the government here is one in action and not stagnant as far as the wellbeing of the citizens is concerned. In all, we see the speaker as an all-round figure who relates with the “low class” and the “high class”.

The use of the deictic “we, us” as seen in the above extracts has two implications. Firstly, it could be seen in the non-individualist case where the speaker involves all in the development of the nation (Kondowe, 2014). He doesn't want to take credit alone. However, on the other hand, it can also be a political manipulation in which the speaker doesn't want to take responsibility or accountability for the content of his speech (Bagheri, 2012). Another persuasive strategy used in the address is acknowledgements. Here, acknowledgement is used to mean recognition of an individual either because of his good deed or misdeed. This is characteristic of good leaders. It shows genuineness, firmness and sincerity. While presenting the address, the president used two forms of acknowledgements namely, accusation and recommendation.

Accusations

Here, the speaker places the responsibility of wrongs done upon an identified agent. The agents accused are individuals, organizations and situations. An instance where an individual was accused for a misfortune in the nation is found in page 2 of the address where a young man was said to be responsible for the death of Honorable J.B. Danquah. In the following extract an organization is accused for a problem in the nation of Ghana.

Extract 4:

...DKM, with the super high interest rates of between 50 and 55% promised, is believed to have caused a loss to its clients in excess of GH¢77 million. I believe that this process should be part of a comprehensive package that looks at protection of the livelihoods of especially small depositors without rewarding the reckless conduct of the microfinance institution, in this case DKM (SONA, p.22)

Extract 4 is from the state of the nation's address. It is an accusation against a micro finance company named DKM whose interest rate has attracted a lot of citizens to invest into the organization. The organization went bankrupt and the investors lost their investments. In other instances, the speaker placed the responsibility of certain misfortunes on unfavorable situations as in the following extracts

Extract 5

...the power sector deficit that, at the time, had become a significant constraint to economic growth and was a major disruption in the lives of Ghanaians, both at home and at work. [...] A huge deficit in power generation had resulted in prolonged rationing. I was painfully aware of the difficulties this situation was posing (SONA, p 23).

The extract 5 is about the power crisis that plagued the nation resulting in frequent power outages and consequent interruptions of works. The speaker accused the situation for being responsible for low economic growth of the nation. The accuser (the president in this case) displays credence as a good observer who is watching over the nation. He knows what exactly the causes of the problems of the nation are. This is the beginning of solutions. In what follows, we will see some instances where the speaker praises some agents for good works they have done.

The agents recommended are individuals, organizations and situations.

Dr. Kwabena Donkor, the former minister of energy and his team were praised for their good work done in the energy sector (SONA, p. 24), the acting MD and the staff of Tema Oil Refinery were also acknowledged for the hard work and sacrifice (SONA, p. 23). In times of power crisis, the speaker also appreciates the patience and the understanding of the nationals as in the following extract.

Extract 4:

I thank the good people of Ghana for your understanding and patience during these challenging times that we have endured (SONA, p.21)

In the extract 4 above, the speaker acknowledged the patience and understanding during financial crisis of the nation. He refers to them as “good people”. We observed that during the period he talked about there were strikes and demonstrations all over the nation. But he overlooked them and thanks them for patience and understanding. This might be a persuasive strategy to ignore the audience's previous behavior and capitalize on the present to achieve his aim of getting the audience vote for him next time (Cirugeda & Ruiz, 2013). Just as he reprimanded the “reckless misconduct” of DKM financial group, he also praise good deeds of the audience in extract 4. This is fairness to all. Those who deserve praise are praised, those who need to be reprimanded publically.

Another device used in the speech is Halliday's (1994) concept of transitivity. Transitivity's main idea is that language represents reality through its relationship of processes, participants of the processes and the circumstance in which the processes occur (Filho, 2004). In the simplest form, it seeks to relate agents (subjects/objects) with processes (verb forms) in clausal elements. Transitivity system includes four main processes: the material, verbal, relational, and mental; and two auxiliaries, existential and behavioral which were considered to be between the borders of the first four (Kondowe, 2014). However, in this current research, we will consider the first four since it indirectly includes the remaining two (Kondowe, 2014). The material clause type focuses on the doings in the physical world. It relates its components namely the actor and the goal. The actor is the doer of the process and the goal, which is an optional element designating the entity affected by the process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The verbal type deals with the act of saying out what is constructed in the mind (Thompson, 2004). The mental type relates the inner act of feeling or thinking something while the relational has to do with the state of being or becoming (Thompson, 2004). It is conveyed through the verb “to be”. In this paper we are interested in the persuasive way the various roles in the address is attributed to the agents. Transitivity is used persuasively in the state of the nation's address to indicate the commitment of the government to national development. The use of transitivity types in the address is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Frequency of Process Types in the Address

Transitivity	SONA	
Process type	Frequency	Percentage
Material	43	40.1
Mental	15	14.1
Verbal	42	39.2
Relational	7	6.5
Total	107	100

Source: Developed by Author

Table 1 shows the use of the four main English transitivity types in the state of the nation's address. Material type took the lions share with 40.1%. In the address, the material process is revealed through the use of verbal forms such as, building, constructing, approved etc. (SONA). The verbal type took 39.2%. This type is noted through the use of verbal forms such as said, indicated, pledged, vowed etc. The mental process, realized through verbs like thought, believed, hoped etc., took 14.1%, while the relational took 6.5%. The manifestation of the relational process is noted by the verb "to be" forms like *are, were, was, will be* etc. From the table, we make some deductions. Firstly, the president gives more attention to concrete-evidence based constructions since these could communicate the practical things he and his government are accomplishing in the physical Ghanaian community. While abstract concepts are scarcely used since they do not relate in the physical. The persuasive import of the use above form of transitivity is that it indicates that the president and his government have achieved and are achieving more physical things that the audience can see than political assumptions that has not concrete evidence.

The last persuasive device we would like to discuss in this paper is the president's use of narratives as examples. The speaker selected certain disadvantaged persons from various tribes' across the nation who benefitted certain projects put up by the current government. The president refers to the man as his "invited guest" (SONA, p. 64). The speaker starts a discourse along the line of the benefit of the "invited guest", weaves a narrative, creates a context, and the fit in the story of the invited guest. An example is below

Extract 5

...It is because of this programme that 16-year-old Apim Shulamite is now the Assistant School Prefect of the Atta Mills Community Day School in Otum. After completing JHS, Apim, who once dreamt of becoming a nurse, had to stay home for a year due to lack of access to a secondary school. Apim's parents are settlers from Somanya. Her father is a taxi driver and her mother sells second-hand clothing. During the year that she stayed at home, Apim sold waakye and worked in a chop bar. Because of the Community Day Schools intervention, students like Apim are able to go from limited prospects to the fulfillment of personal dreams that ultimately benefit the entire nation. (SONA, p.5)

Extract 5 is the story of Apim Shulamite who benefitted from the 123 school building project initiated by the president. The speaker introduced an educational discourse with focus on the initiation of 123 school building project. Halfway through the discourse, he plunged in the story of Apim Shulamite. To achieve further credence, he called out the flesh and blood beneficiary out of the hundreds sited guest as a living example of his assertion. In narrating the story, the president connected the current success of Apim to his initiated project there by giving the speaker a stronger persuasive ground to be elected the next time. He also gave a brief background information on the sampled beneficiary. The persuasive climax of the story is the contrasting nature of Apim's poor background with his current glorious position as the Assistant school prefect of Atta Mills Community Day School. In a similar persuasive manner, the speaker presented 16 beneficiaries in all. The samples were carefully chosen from across the ten regions, and all religious persuasion of Ghana and all from difficult backgrounds.

The persuasiveness of these examples lies in the fact that the audience, no matter the religious, cultural or political background feels fairly represented in the president's choice of sample. The emotional nature of the narrative also constitute the use of pathos (appeal to emotions), ethos, (appeal to credibility of the speaker), and logos (appeal to logical reasoning faculty of the audience)

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the persuasive nature of the state of the nation's address by His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, the president of Ghana. Using the rhetorical theory of Aristotle, Campbell, and Lauer we analyzed the 64 pages address. We discovered that the speaker used technics like, identification with the audience, acknowledgement of deserving persons and rebuking of misbehaving individuals and organization and language forms such as transitivity and concrete examples for persuasive purposes. This study has implication for further study in the area of persuasion since there are many more analyzable contents than we could include in this current paper.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, it was recommended that further investigations (interviews) be done into on the practicality of the influence of political speeches on voting habit of the populace.

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