

Role of Persuasive Language in Shaping Voter Perception: A Comparative Analysis of John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's Campaign Speeches in the 2012 Presidential Elections in Ghana.

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Abstract

This study explored the use of persuasive language in the political campaign messages of John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo during the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana. Utilizing a qualitative content analysis of campaign speeches reported in one of the leading Ghanaian newspapers, the Daily Graphic, the research identified the rhetorical strategies employed by both candidates to sway voter behavior. The analysis, guided by Robert Cialdini's principles of influence and Marwell and Schmitt's compliance-gaining strategies, revealed that both Mahama and Akufo-Addo extensively used promises, appeals, authority, and positive altercasting to connect with voters, establish credibility, and present themselves as the most capable candidates for the presidency. These strategies were crafted to resonate with the electorate's concerns and aspirations, thereby shaping the electoral narratives. While the study provides valuable insights into the role of language in Ghanaian political campaigns, the findings underscore the significance of rhetorical strategies in political communication and their impact on electoral outcomes, offering implications for future research on political discourse in similar democratic contexts.

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1. Introduction

Political Communication has consistently been acknowledged as a pivotal tool in shaping public opinions and steering electoral outcomes. Across diverse political landscapes, leaders and parties alike deploy a range of rhetorical strategies to influence voter behavior, consolidate their legitimacy, and discredit opposition. This practice transcends geographical boundaries, embodying a universal attribute of electoral dynamics in democratic systems (Smith, J. A., 2022).

Globally, the deployment of persuasive language in political campaigns has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, particularly in mature democracies where media coverage and public addresses are instrumental in shaping voter perceptions (Chilton, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2014). In contexts such as the United States, analyses of presidential debates and campaign speeches have underscored the critical role of rhetoric in influencing undecided voters and solidifying party loyalty (Jamieson & Campbell, 2001).

In Africa, the role of language in politics is equally profound, albeit shaped by distinct socio-political dynamics compared to Western democracies. Political Communication across the continent must deftly navigate the intricacies of multilingualism, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic inequalities. Politicians, frequently employ a hybrid of traditional oratory, modern rhetorical techniques, and cultural symbols to appeal to diverse electorates (Blommaert, 2005; Marfo, 2014). Consequently, language in African political discourse is inextricably linked to issues of identity, power, and social cohesion.

Ghana, recognized as one of Africa's most stable democracies, provides a compelling context for analyzing the use of persuasive language in political campaigns. Since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1992, the country has witnessed a series of competitive elections, with political parties increasingly employing advanced communication strategies to secure voter support. The 2012 presidential election, in particular, was notable for its high level of rhetorical sophistication, as the leading candidates, John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, utilized a range of persuasive techniques to shape public opinion and influence voter behavior.

This study undertook a comprehensive analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed by John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in their campaign speeches during the 2012 presidential elections, with a focus on how these strategies were meticulously crafted to influence voter behavior. Utilizing the frameworks of Speech Act Theory and Compliance Gaining Theory, the research aimed to enrich the broader discourse on political communication within Ghana, offering insights that extend to comparable electoral contexts in other African democracies.

2. Review of Related Literature

The Persuasive Power of Language in Global Political Leadership

In the global context, political leaders have consistently utilized persuasive language to galvanize support, shape public opinion, and secure electoral victories. This practice is evident across different political systems, from the democratic elections in the United States to the parliamentary systems in Europe. The persuasive power of language in politics has been a subject of academic

inquiry for decades, with scholars such as Geis (1987) and Chilton (2004) highlighting how rhetorical strategies are employed to achieve specific political outcomes.

For instance, studies have shown that American presidents, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Barack Obama, used language not only to communicate policies but also to inspire, reassure, and mobilize the public during times of crisis and elections (Jamieson & Campbell, 2001). The effectiveness of these speeches often lies in their ability to blend logical argumentation with emotional appeal, a balance that is critical in persuading a diverse electorate.

Navigating Linguistic Diversity and Socio-Political Complexity in African Political Campaigns

In Africa, the role of language in political campaigns takes on additional layers of complexity due to the continent's rich linguistic diversity and complex socio-political dynamics. Politicians often navigate these complexities by crafting messages that resonate across different ethnic and linguistic groups, often using a mix of languages, cultural references, and symbols (Blommaert, 2005).

In many African countries, political rhetoric is deeply embedded in the oral traditions of the people, where the use of proverbs, metaphors, and storytelling is common (Yankah, 1995). This rhetorical style not only appeals to the electorate's emotions but also connects with their cultural identity. For example, Nelson Mandela's speeches during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa are celebrated for their powerful blend of traditional African oratory and modern political rhetoric (Limb, 2008).

The Dynamics of Persuasive Language in Ghana's Political Campaigns

Ghana, with its history of democratic transitions and competitive elections, provides a fertile ground for studying the use of persuasive language in political campaigns. The country's political landscape is characterized by a high level of voter engagement, a free press, and vibrant civil society, all of which contribute to a dynamic environment for political communication.

The 2012 presidential elections in Ghana were particularly significant for several reasons. Firstly, they were held following the sudden death of sitting President John Evans Atta Mills, which led to John Dramani Mahama assuming the presidency and subsequently running as the NDC's candidate. Secondly, the election was fiercely contested, with Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the NPP challenging Mahama in what became one of the closest electoral contests in Ghana's history (Ayee, 2017).

The speeches delivered by Mahama and Akufo-Addo during the campaign periods were crucial in shaping the electoral narrative. Both candidates employed a range of rhetorical strategies aimed at addressing the electorate's concerns, projecting their visions for Ghana, and countering the other's campaign messages. This study analyzed these speeches to uncover the underlying persuasive techniques and their impact on voter behavior.

Applying Speech Act Theory to Political Communication in Ghana

Speech Act Theory, as developed by J.L. Austin (1962) and further elaborated by John Searle (1969), provides a useful framework for analyzing political speeches. The theory postulates that

that language is not just a tool for conveying information but also for performing actions. In the context of political communication, speeches are not merely informative; they are performative acts aimed at persuading, promising, commanding, or committing (Searle, 1969).

In Ghanaian political campaigns, speech acts are central to how candidates communicate their intentions and engage with voters. For example, when Mahama promised to improve infrastructure, he was performing a commissive speech act, committing himself to a future action that would resonate with the electorate. Similarly, Akufo-Addo's appeals to justice and good governance can be seen as directive speech acts, intended to influence voters' decisions by aligning them with his vision.

Compliance Gaining Strategies in Ghanaian Political Campaigns: Insights from the 2012 Elections

Compliance Gaining Theory, proposed by Marwell and Schmitt (1967), offers insights into how communicators use various strategies to gain compliance from others. In political campaigns, these strategies are used to persuade voters to support a candidate or policy. The theory identifies several tactics, including promises, threats, and appeals to authority, which are designed to influence behavior.

Cialdini's (1984) principles of influence, such as reciprocity, commitment, and social proof, further expand on how compliance-gaining strategies operate in political communication. These principles are often employed in campaign speeches to create persuasive messages that resonate with the electorate's values and beliefs.

During the 2012 elections, both Mahama and Akufo-Addo used compliance-gaining strategies to sway voters. Mahama's promises of development and Akufo-Addo's appeals to authority and social proof are examples of how these strategies were operationalized in their campaign messages. This study examined these strategies to understand their effectiveness in influencing voter behavior in Ghana.

3. Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the portrayal of political narratives within media coverage of Ghana's 2012 presidential campaign. The focus was specifically on articles from the *Daily Graphic*, one of Ghana's most widely read and respected newspapers. This choice was informed by the newspaper's long-standing credibility, comprehensive coverage of national issues, and significant influence in shaping public opinion across diverse demographics.

Qualitative content analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of textual data, providing insights into the themes, patterns, and underlying messages conveyed in the media. By examining how campaign speeches were reported in the *Daily Graphic*, the study aimed to understand the framing of political messages and the representation of the candidates, John Mahama and Nana Akufo-Addo.

For this analysis, news reports covering campaign speeches delivered by Mahama and Akufo-Addo between August and December 2012 were purposively sampled. This period was selected to capture the dynamic nature of the electoral campaign as it unfolded, highlighting how each candidate's rhetoric was presented in relation to key political issues. The purposive sampling technique ensured that the selected articles were relevant to the research questions and provided a comprehensive overview of the campaign narratives.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved identifying articles that specifically reported on the candidates' speeches, as well as their implications for the election. A rich set of articles were carefully analyzed, focusing on the language used, the themes highlighted, and the overall portrayal of each candidate. Key aspects such as tone, framing, and the presence of any biases were also critically examined to understand how media representation may influence voter perceptions and political discourse.

To ensure rigor and reliability in the analysis, the coding process was conducted systematically. Initially, thematic categories were developed based on the research objectives, and then individual articles were coded accordingly. This iterative process involved refining categories as new insights emerged, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the data.

4.Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the campaign speeches delivered by Mahama and Akufo-Addo as reported in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper between August to December 2012, the peak season of the said election. This approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic and objective identification of specific themes, patterns, and meanings within the newspaper content, enabling the researcher to explore how the *Daily Graphic* framed the political speeches and the underlying narratives.

After collecting the newspaper articles, the first step involved close reading through the reports to familiarize with the content. This process helped in identifying recurring themes, key messages, and communication strategies employed by both political figures. It also aided in understanding the context and structure of the reports.

The content of the articles was then subjected to open coding. Key phrases, statements, and references that reflected political messaging, persuasive strategies, and the media's portrayal of the candidates were assigned labels or codes. These codes were developed inductively from the data and grouped into preliminary categories based on recurring patterns or significant content in the news reports.

Once the data was coded, thematic analysis was employed to organize the codes into broader themes that reflected the main narratives emerging from the newspaper reports. The thematic analysis focused on identifying how Mahama and Akufo-Addo's speeches were portrayed in terms of promises, policies, and appeals to voters among others. A comparative analysis was conducted to examine how the *Daily Graphic* represented the two

candidates' campaign messages. The analysis focused on whether the newspaper exhibited any bias in its coverage and how the framing might have influenced public perception of the candidates. The frequency and prominence of specific themes were noted, such as the coverage of key policy issues, leadership qualities, and voter appeals. The final stage of analysis involved interpreting the data in the context of the 2012 election campaign. Insights were drawn from the themes to understand the media's role in shaping public opinion during the campaign period. The study explored how the newspaper reports might have contributed to the political discourse and voter perceptions by framing the candidates' messages in specific ways.

Through this rigorous analysis, the study aimed to provide insights into the media's influence on the electoral process and the dynamics of political communication during the 2012 elections. The findings were contextualized within the broader political and media landscape of Ghana

5. Findings

This study critically examined the deployment of persuasive language in the political discourse of John Dramani Mahama of the NDC and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of the NPP, as reported in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper. The analysis is framed within the compliance-gaining strategies proposed by Marwell and Schmitt (1967) and Cialdini's principles of influence (1984). The findings indicate that both Mahama and Akufo-Addo consistently employed rhetorical tactics such as promises, appeals to authority, and positive altercasting. These strategies were strategically utilized to establish a rapport with the electorate, enhance their credibility, and position themselves as the most compelling candidates for the presidency.

The Role of Promises in Ghanaian Political Campaigns: A Strategic Tool for Voter Persuasion

According to Marwell and Schmitt (1967), a promise involves a speaker pledging a reward for compliance. In Ghanaian politics, this strategy is prevalent. During the 2012 elections, both Mahama and Akufo-Addo frequently made promises in their speeches. Both candidates made extensive use of promises to persuade voters. For example, Mahama promised infrastructural development and inclusivity, while Akufo-Addo promised better governance and improvements in public services. These promises were strategically crafted to address the immediate concerns of the electorate, thereby increasing their appeal.

John Dramani Mahama stated:

"The NDC is a government that stands for everybody. I am going to be the president of all Ghanaians. It does not matter whether you are NPP, CPP, or PPP" (Daily Graphic, 15th October ,2012).

"We will construct new rail lines and make sure that they are working. I will do everything possible to get the GRC back on its feet" (Daily Graphic, 23rd October 2012).

"The NDC will not deny the municipality its fair share of projects such as an ultra-modern hospital and road networks befitting its status" (Daily Graphic, 6th December 2012).

These promises aimed to create a connection with the electorate, assuring them that their votes were essential for fulfillment.

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo also emphasized promises:

“I am not like NDC leaders who make promises they can’t keep. I have not come here to deceive you” (Daily Graphic, 3rd October 2012).

“We will ensure that the water sector gets the investment it needs” (Daily Graphic, 31st October 2012).

“The NPP will go a step further to save our health system and keep our people healthy” (Daily Graphic, 19th October 2012).

Both candidates strategically aligned their promises with the electorate's needs, seeking their endorsement.

Leveraging Authority in Ghanaian Political Campaigns: Establishing Leadership and Credibility

The use of authority was another common strategy. Mahama and Akufo-Addo positioned themselves as leaders who could decisively address the nation's challenges. Authority in Cialdini's framework involves portraying oneself as capable of affecting change. This strategy not only reinforced their promises but also underscored their ability to lead effectively (Daily Graphic, 25th October, 2012; Daily Graphic, 31st October, 2012). Mahama asserted authority with statements like:

“The security service will expose and deal ruthlessly with any person or group of persons who plan to disrupt the forthcoming elections” (Daily Graphic, 25th October 2012).

“We will construct new rail lines and make sure that they are working” (Daily Graphic, 23rd October 2012).

Similarly, Akufo-Addo's authoritative tone included:

“Our goal is to ensure that every Ghanaian has access to potable water” (Daily Graphic, 31st October 2012).

“We are going to start the free Senior High School Education policy next year when you give me your mandate” (Daily Graphic, 1st October 2012).

Positive Altercasting in Ghanaian Political Rhetoric: Leveraging Past Achievements for Electoral Appeal

Both candidates used positive altercasting to align themselves with the achievements of past leaders or their own previous successes. This strategy aimed to create a favorable comparison between themselves and their opponents, thereby persuading voters to support them (Daily Graphic, 5th October, 2012; Daily Graphic, 26th November, 2012). Candidates highlighted

positive associations to enhance their appeal. Mahama reminded voters of the NDC's contributions:

“Apart from Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who built the Ghana Education Trust Schools, it was the NDC government that had established more schools” (Daily Graphic, 5th October 2012).

“The NDC could be trusted to deliver on its promises because it had a track record of delivery” (Daily Graphic, 26th November 2012).

Akufo-Addo used similar tactics to associate his party with development:

“Politics is all about ensuring that you serve the people in truth and honesty” (Daily Graphic, 3rd October 2012).

“When the British decided on free secondary education... it was during the worst economic hardship” (Daily Graphic, 27th November 2012).

Negative Altercasting in Ghanaian Political Campaigns: Using Opponent Criticism to Influence Voter Perceptions

This strategy persuades voters by presenting a candidate's opponent negatively. Mahama cautioned voters against electing Akufo-Addo by citing examples of countries that failed after implementing free SHS:

“Countries such as Kenya, Botswana, and Uganda... were now suffering” (Daily Graphic, 30th November 2012).

Akufo-Addo echoed similar sentiments:

“Nana Addo cautioned Ghanaians to be wary of Mahama and Amissah-Arthur” (Daily Graphic, 29th October 2012).

Emotional Appeals in Ghanaian Political Campaigns: Harnessing Sentiment to Connect

Both candidates utilized emotional appeals effectively. Mahama invoked sentiments related to the late President John Evans Atta Mills:

“The victory would be dedicated to the memory of the late President John Evans Atta Mills” (Daily Graphic, 6th December 2012).

Akufo-Addo connected with parents facing educational struggles:

“Such sad stories of lack of resources to cater for secondary education give me pain and anxiety” (Daily Graphic, 10th November 2012).

Social Proof and the Influence of Community Endorsements on Political Credibility in Ghanaian Campaigns

In their campaigns, both Mahama and Akufo-Addo emphasized the backing of influential community leaders, with Mahama citing the goodwill of chiefs towards the NDC government and Akufo-Addo expressing gratitude for the warm receptions he received.

Candidates showcased support from influential community leaders. Mahama claimed:

“Wherever I travelled in the country, the chiefs... have shown tremendous goodwill and appreciation to the NDC government” (Daily Graphic, 6th December 2012).

Akufo-Addo similarly highlighted his support:

“I am overwhelmed by the huge welcome offered me” (Daily Graphic, 10th November 2012).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper identified persuasive language elements used by John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo during their 2012 campaigns, utilizing Marwell and Schmitt’s compliance-gaining strategies and Cialdini’s principles of persuasion. The study highlighted the critical role of persuasive language in political campaigns, particularly in a democratic setting like Ghana. Both John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo effectively used rhetorical strategies such as promises, authority, and positive altercasting to influence voter behavior during the 2012 presidential elections.

The analysis shows that both candidates were attuned to the electorate's needs, modifying their language to resonate with diverse demographics. Their strategies included promises, authority, positive and negative altercasting, emotional appeals, and social proof, aimed at swaying voter support. Understanding these strategies provides insights into the dynamics of political communication and the ways in which language shapes electoral outcomes.

Drawing on compliance-gaining strategies by Marwell and Schmitt (1967) and Cialdini’s principles of influence (1984), the analysis highlights how both candidates effectively employed promises, appeals to authority, and positive altercasting to resonate with voters, establish credibility, and position themselves as the most compelling choice for leadership.

These rhetorical strategies were not only aimed at addressing the immediate concerns of the electorate but also at shaping perceptions of their leadership capabilities and differentiating themselves from their opponents. Additionally, the use of negative altercasting, emotional appeals, and endorsements from community leaders further strengthened their persuasive efforts.

The findings suggest that the strategic deployment of these compliance-gaining tactics is crucial in shaping voter behavior and influencing electoral outcomes. This study underscores the significance of persuasive communication in political discourse and its impact on the democratic process in Ghana

Notwithstanding the above, this study is limited by its focus on a single election cycle and the speeches of only two candidates. While these limitations allowed for a detailed analysis of the 2012 elections, they also restrict the generalizability of the findings to other elections or

candidates. Additionally, the reliance on newspaper reports may have introduced bias, as the selected newspaper could have its own editorial slants.

Future research should consider a broader range of election cycles and candidates to provide a more comprehensive understanding of persuasive language in Ghanaian politics. It would also be beneficial to incorporate other forms of media, such as radio and television broadcasts, to capture a more diverse array of campaign messages. Finally, a comparative analysis with other African countries could offer valuable insights into the use of persuasive language across different cultural and political contexts.

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