Analysing John Evans Atta Mills' Speeches Projecting him as 'A Man of Peace'

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates some selected political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills through the lenses of sociolinguistics. This is against the back drop that Ghana's post-independence political history which is largely characterized by the construction of beliefs about its leaders, especially those who rise to become president. The selected speeches cover every aspect of his political life, including- a campaign speech (as an opposition leader in the run- up to the 2008 elections), an Inaugural speech, an Independent day speech, a Republic day speech and a New year's eve message to the nation (all as president). The objective of the research is to ascertain the veracity or mendacity of the accolade 'Asomdwee Hene' translated as 'Man of Peace' as was championed by the campaign machinery of his party (in the heat of the 2008 presidential elections) to describe him; a title which metamorphosed into a household term in Ghana's political space. Through an eclectic approach, the analysis encapsulated the metafunctions as postulated in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Onah's Concept of Peace as perceived in the African Traditional culture as its framework. To this end, the analysis was structured into three parts (Fairclough, 2001). The first part analyzed the stylistic features prevalent in the selected political speeches and was followed by an interpretation of the discursive properties based on the socio-cultural and political setting of the country. This was however carried out concurrently with an explanation of the socio-cultural and political setting which forms the bases for our understanding of the speeches. The findings of the research show that the selected speeches resonate with Onah's concept of peace in the African Traditional Culture- Peace as a result of harmonious living, Peace as a gift from God and Peace as a pre-condition for progress.

Keywords: *Political Speeches, Sociolinguistics, Political Life, Asomdwee Hene, John Evans Atta Mills*

1. Introduction

Touted as the beacon of democracy in Africa, Ghana's post-independence political history has always been inundated with the construction of beliefs about its political leaders. These beliefs are tactfully couched in accolades. Especially in its current fourth republican dispensation, every political leader who has risen to the high office of the presidency has a title which is well known in the political space. These accolades are first birthed within the internal party structure of the political leader and it is then projected to the electorates by the campaign machinery of the party. The purpose is to present an astute branding of the leader in order to make the ultimate political gain. Usually, these titles are borne out of the leader's personal conviction or philosophy which is reflected by his deeds or pronouncements.

The 2008 Presidential elections in Ghana saw the emergence of a catchphrase, 'Man of Peace'(Asomdwee hene in the Akan language) to describe the then leader of the opposition party, John Evans Atta Mills by his party's campaign machinery. It however became entrenched after he was elected president and later metamorphosed into a household name in Ghana.

Leech (1981) asserts that one's use of language or style of language is a sure way to ascertaining one's personality. A study by Nicholas and Tal (2005) also reveals that in the spoken form, language leaves residues of personality in the conversations we hold and the personal narratives we tell. In the written forms as well, language leaves residues of personality in our poetry, essays and blogs. Another interesting development which has surfaced in the job market also shows that most potential employers follow their

prospective employees on social media platforms like Facebook, Tweeter etc. in order to have substantial information about their personality etc. based on their choice of words. This helps them, according to a research conducted by The Pitt News (2013), to determine the personality of their prospective employees. Language choice or language style therefore becomes instrumental in distinguishing between language users or personalities. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, amongst other things, considers Language as a system of choices which presents its users with a network of choices to create a text, whether spoken or written. The meaning of a text is therefore dependent upon the choices made by the speaker from the options within the language system or, in some cases, from what is not chosen (Teo, 2000, p.24). Besides this, it also postulates that texts reflect different but general and concomitant types of meaning. By experiential meaning, a text or discourse provides readers with a view of the world as seen or understood by the writer or the speaker. The interpersonal meaning reveals that a text or discourse reflects the speaker's role in the speech situation, as he interacts with others (Halliday, 1973). Systemic Functional Linguistics, furthermore, posits that a text is best understood when information about the context within which it was generated: the 'context of situation' and the 'context of culture' are available.

This study examines some of the political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills based on Igwebuike Onah's Concept of Peace as perceived in the African setting with the goal of ascertaining whether he was indeed a man of peace as projected by his party machinery.

2. Theoretical Framework

Onah asserts that, Peace, as perceived in the African context is not an abstract poetic concept but rather a down -to earth practical concept which permeates every facet of the life of the African and thus could be seen, felt and touched.   He again intimates that, Peace, as perceived within the African context, should not be conceived in relation to conflict and war but rather in relation to order, harmony and equilibrium. Thus, Peace takes into cognizance all that it requires for a balance between the beings in the universe. Onah further postulates four sources that can lead to the attainment of Peace. Three of these will be used for the analysis.

2.1 Peace as a result of harmonious living

Onah presents two caveats of harmony in the African traditional setting. They include harmony in one's personal life and harmony with one another. The need for a being to reconcile his or her yearnings with his or her means and link his thoughts, feelings, and utterances in the execution of his social and religious duties is the goal of personal harmony. This results in the attainment of inner peace. A cordial relationship between a being and other beings in the community is the underlining factor for the attainment of harmony with one another. Emphasizing on the role of speech in the attainment of harmonious living, Onah stressed that the maintenance of the unity and balance of the beings in the world is the overriding goal of communication. The attainment of this objective enhances the growth of life whilst the reverse weakens and threatens the integration of the whole community.

2.2 Peace as a gift from God

Peace in the African traditional setting is believed to originate from God since He is considered the source of universal order and harmony. Whilst attempting to do their best to maintain the peace of the community, they acknowledge their fallibility and so look up to their creator for the provision of true peace. Sacrifices and offerings are therefore explicitly made to ask for peace most often in the situation where a violation of a religious or moral norm has occurred, or to ward off any evil spirits capable of thwarting one's peace. As part of the religious functions of family heads and political leaders in most African traditional setting is the maintenance of peace through settlement of disputes, offering of sacrifices and prayers for peace. Another point which is worth noting at this stage is that, in the African traditional setting the peace-maker is said to be

a representative of divine power on the one hand and social harmony on the other. As an individual he expresses the divine origin of peace, a peace that is associated with the virtues of loyalty, honesty and trust in God.

2.3 Peace as a pre-condition for progress

Peace is also perceived as a pre-requisite for progress in the African traditional setting. Since progress is considered as a blessing from God, it therefore becomes impossible to think of true progress in the midst of moral, social and cosmic disorder. Peace in the

community as well as in the individual (inner peace) provides a good platform for major developmental progress in the community and a quality of life for the individual. This is the true meaning of progress. It is viewed as just another word for more peace; however, there simply cannot be more peace unless there is some peace already

2.4 Peace as fullness of life

The fullness of life is perceived as a prerequisite for the attainment of Peace in the African traditional setting. This is achieved when there is harmony in the network of relations amongst the spiritual, human and material beings. One cannot be said to have peace if there is a lack in any of the basic things that are considered necessary for life in an African society such as good health, a wife, husband, children, family, and means of sustenance. Anyone who possesses all these things also needs to also have good relationship with the other members of the community whether living or dead, otherwise he or she cannot be said to have peace.

3. Methodology

Through the adoption of the Purposive Sampling technique, five speeches which reflect the speaker's life both as an opposition leader and as President were selected. The type of purposive sampling which encourages this approach is the theory- based or operational construct sampling. This allows the researcher to sample data based on the manifestations and revelations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct. In this sense, data is chosen to fit into or mimic a favoured phenomenon chosen by the researcher.

3.1 Analysis and Discussion of Corpus

The study considers fifteen corpora for the analysis and discussion, thus:

Corpus 1

I have always said that I will be President for all Ghanaians whether they voted for me or not, and without consideration for which part of the country they come from. It will be my duty as president to heal wounds and unite our dear nation. I intend to pursue relentlessly all avenues for entrenching peace and unity in all parts of the country as I am enjoined by the constitution to do. (**Inaugural speech**)

Corpus 2

Our politics will not focus on power and privilege. On the contrary we will not forget the concerns of the Ghanaian people who want to see an improvement in their living conditions. Willingness to put personal advantage aside will be one of the key demands of those who will serve in the Atta Mills government. Honesty, fairness, compassion, and sincerity will be the hallmark of my administration. I have no wish to carry out political vendetta of any kind. (**Inaugural speech**)

Corpus 3

I want to repeat with all the force at my command, the warning note that I sounded last year, that should there be another attempt by the ruling or any other party at the December elections to steal the verdict of the people, the National Democratic Congress and all fair minded Ghanaians will categorically reject out of hand the fraudulent results so proclaimed and will adopt all legitimate means, to seek redress to any such political misconduct. (**Campaign speech**)

3.2 Analysis

In the above corpora, there are an appreciable evidence of the speaker's desire to champion peaceful coexistence in the country through his pronouncements; a situation which resonates with Onah's first caveat. In corpus one for example, he expresses his preparedness to promote peace and unity amongst his citizenry. Even though he led his party to an electoral victory, he repeatedly expressed his desire to champion the course of all and sundry and be president for the entire nation regardless of which of the political divide one belongs to. His commitment to also revive victims of the electoral defeat, who are mainly his political opponents, testifies of his unflinching desire to promote unity and peace in the country.

Corpus two expresses similar sentiment; here the speaker exposes his disposition as one who is ready to fulfill his moral obligation to ensure harmony between his people. Hinting on the criterion for the selection of officials who will serve in his administration, the speaker expressed that such people must be ready to put their parochial interest aside and seek the common good of the whole nation thus, promoting the spirit of unity of purpose. Also in outlining the ingredients which will characterize his administration, the speaker listed qualities which promote healthy relationship amongst people such as honesty, fairness, compassion, and sincerity. The speaker's motivation for this high moral standard which he has set for himself is rooted in his willingness to refrain from any act of vengeance on his opponents, a

situation which has dominated the political sphere in the fourth republic. To promote harmony amongst the citizenry, he is committed to forgive any ill treatment he has supposedly suffered in the hands of the outgoing government (which doubles as his political rival).

The third corpus almost presented a sharp departure away from the first two. The concluding sentence however makes the difference. The initial choice of words of the speaker undoubtedly interferes with the harmony in the country given the atmosphere of fear and anxiety which characterizes pre-elections. As the leader of the main opposition party he employs military jargons, such as force, command, warning note, sounded etc. to indicate the motivation for his call. He thus refers to his party adherents as a force as though he was a freedom fighter and they, a mercenary group ready to carry out his bidding by employing unconstitutional means to safeguard the smooth running of the election. His message to the other political parties especially the ruling party is a vehement threat against any attempt aimed at tampering with the election result. The impact of his initial words coupled with the prevalent pre-election atmosphere of fear and anxiety interferes with the orderliness and harmonious coexistence of the citizenry in the country, especially between sympathizers of the ruling party and that of his party. However, the speaker's concluding choice of words calms the nerves of the electorates and allays their fears. His reaction to a tampered election result will be that of an out- right rejection of the declared result which will be accompanied by an adoption of the constitutional procedures to seek redress. The choice of reaction by the speaker is very significant since an illegitimate choice could jeopardize the peace of the country. The speaker's choice of reaction however; is one that will rather strengthen the peace and harmony of the nation. Even though the speaker could have avoided his concluding choice of words, a case which would have psychologically affected the ruling party and thus interfered with the peace of the country, he was quick to clarify his stance by indicating his intended reaction. The speaker's intended reaction distils his earlier threat.

Corpus 4

Good morning fellow Ghanaians; my brothers and sisters, friends and daughters of mother Ghana. A few hours ago we ushered in the New Year 2010; let us give thanks to

the almighty God for shepherding us individually and as a nation through the year 2009. (**New Year Message**)

Corpus 5

May the good Lord continue to bless you and give you strength and long life so that we can drink from your fountain of wisdom.

Corpus 6

May the Good Lord continue to bless our homeland Ghana and make us greater and stronger. (**Republic Day speech**)

Corpus 7

Thanks to the steadfastness of the good people of Ghana, sovereign will has prevailed. We give thanks and praise to the almighty. (**Inaugural speech**)

Corpus 8

Let us continue to pledge on our honour to be faithful and loyal to Ghana our Motherland and also pledge to uphold and defend the good name of Ghana. May God be our helper! (**Independence Day speech**)

The second batch of the corpus commensurate with Onah's second caveat. An in-depth analysis of the speaker's choice of words in the course of his interaction with his audience reveals that he consistently acknowledged the active role of God in the country and thus invokes His name and claims to rely on His blessings at all times. The speaker attributes his ascension to the presidency to divine will. He therefore expresses his gratitude to God for making him a steward over the nation. The speaker's choice of words reveals his reverence of God and admittance of his fallibility; it also shows his acknowledgement of God's active role in the country.

Corpus 9

However, it is important that as we soldier on to build the Better Ghana that we desire, we do not reduce our political discourse to invectives and name calling. Some of us can take the name calling but not all of us can. And sometimes you cannot predict what those who cannot take it may be tempted to do. It is a danger we must all guard against. Especially for those of us who find ourselves in leadership positions, it is important that we engage in decorous discourse and pull those who look up to us along the path of decorum and decency. This is so whether it is discourse within our own parties or between and among parties. I have always said, and will keep on saying that as a nation, we will continue to have

our differences especially political differences. Indeed, we all cannot share the same belief or think along the same lines. But those differences must not keep our eyes away from the need to collectively put our shoulders to the wheel and build a Better Ghana for our generation and the generations unborn. **(Republic Day speech)**

3.3 Discussion

Onah's third caveat is echoed in the eighth corpus, thus, we see a conscious effort by the speaker to educate the citizenry on the relationship between peaceful coexistence and progress. As the leader of the nation he recognizes the significant role of discourse towards nation building and as such calls for the kind of interaction that will strengthen one another and not incite acrimony amongst them. Even though he has been a victim of derogatory remarks from other people in the country, his commitment to ensure harmonious relationship makes him forgive such culprits. However; he still pursues this agenda of constructive and decorous discourse amongst the people because of two reasons. Firstly, the unknown reaction of others who have suffered from such rude remarks threatens the peace of the nation as one does not know the impact such reactions will have on the peace of the country. The need to also leave a good legacy for the younger generation by setting the right example is the second motivation behind this crusade. As part of their role as leaders of the country is the fulfillment of their moral obligation by ensuring that their choice of words enhance the prevailing harmony in the country. Rather than resorting to rude remarks amidst the expression of dissenting views, his call to the leaders to cultivate the attitude of tolerance is a step in the right direction given the pluralistic nature of the country. Tolerance is therefore the tool for harmonious relationship in this democratic dispensation the country finds itself so to speak. The speaker's admonishment of the leaders to be guided by the collective interest of the country in all decision making processes is an indication of his commitment to promote unity of purpose which will enhance a healthy relationship amongst all and sundry. This will get rid of all acts of selfishness and parochial interest; elements which interfere with harmonious living.

4. Conclusion

The research investigated some selected political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills with the objective of ascertaining the veracity or otherwise of the accolade

'Asomdwee Hene' or 'Man of Peace' which was first used to describe him by his campaign machinery prior to the 2008 Presidential elections and later became a house hold term in the political space of Ghana. The Purposive sampling technique was carried out in the selection of the political speeches. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Onah's concept of Peace in the African Traditional setting were expended as frameworks for the analysis. The findings show that most of the selected political speeches resonated with the Onah's caveat for the attainment of peace in the African Traditional setting.

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