

CONCESSION STRATEGIES IN DISCOURSE: CASE OF MAHAMA AND KENYATTA'S SPEECHES.

Marius Eder BROU

Université Alassane OUATTARA

ederbrou@yahoo.fr

Grégoire Anahet YAO

Université Alassane OUATTARA

Kouadio Ange Michael N'GUESSAN

Université Alassane OUATTARA

Abstract

The advent of the multiparty system in Africa in the early 1990's has paved the way to liberalism in the political game. Since then, presidential elections have most of the time resulted in troubles, crisis and war. Indeed, elections are contested by opposition parties due to fraud, irregularity, lack of transparency, and fairness. Thus, political discourse researchers have always been interested in the speeches delivered by the winning parties rather than that of losing candidates. relying on Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper, intends to show the effect of political concession speeches on democracy. It reveals that through their forms, political concession speeches are speeches of moral weakness, honour and maturity which are woven around some linguistic patterns and those speeches aim at rooting democracy.

Keywords: Concession speech, Democracy, honour, linguistic pattern, Maturity, Political, Weakness.

Résumé

L'avènement du multipartisme en Afrique au début des années 1990 a ouvert la voie au libéralisme dans le jeu politique. Depuis lors, les élections présidentielles ont la plupart du temps débouché sur des troubles, des crises et des guerres. En effet, les élections sont contestées par les partis d'opposition pour cause de fraude, d'irrégularité, de manque de transparence et d'équité. Ainsi, les chercheurs en discours politique se sont toujours intéressés aux discours prononcés par les vainqueurs plutôt qu'à ceux des candidats perdants. En s'appuyant sur l'analyse critique du discours, cet article vise à montrer l'effet des discours de concession politique sur la démocratie. Il révèle qu'à travers leurs formes, les discours de concession politique sont des discours de faiblesse morale, d'honneur et de maturité qui se construisent en utilisant certains outils linguistiques et visent à enraciner la démocratie.

Mots-clés : démocratie, discours de concession, Faiblesse, Honneur, Maturité, Modèle linguistique, Politique.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the multiparty system in Africa in the early 1990's has paved the way to liberalism in the political arena. People's demand of democracy has forced political leaders to organize inclusive elections. Democracy also gives the authority to citizens to choose their own leaders. But, the pervasive political reality is that elections, general, and presidential ballots, in particular have most of the time resulted in troubles, crises and armed conflicts. Indeed, elections are mostly contested by opposition parties or defeated parties because of accusation fraud and irregularity, which evidence, for the losers, lack of transparency and fairness orchestrated by the ruling party.

As a result of that democratic landscape characterized by suspicion and constant accusations of frauds, the speeches of defeated candidates show that defeat is rarely conceded. All the stakes of such political situation are framed within the type of discourse used by ruling parties, on the one hand, and opposition parties, on the other hand. In politics, a concession speech is a public speech delivered by a defeated candidate to accept officially his defeat. The scarcity of concession speeches in African politics, however, has hardly aroused the interest of scholars in political discourse. Most of the investigations are focused on victory and inaugural speeches of elected presidents. This investigation puts forth the concession speeches of Uhuru Kenyatta from Kenya in 2013 and the Ghanaian President John Mahama in 2016, which constitute the corpus of this paper is therefore, an attempt to fill this gap.

In these speeches, the ex-presidents did not only accept their defeat; they also congratulated the winners. In addition, they called their militants to accept the results of the polls and get together with the new elected presidents. The study intends to explain that democratic language embedded in the concession speeches of the above mentioned presidents is an asset to revitalize Africa's democracy. The discussion on the concession speech paves the way to the following questions: what are the markers used by the two leaders to highlight democracy? Do the markers trigger the sense of sustainable democracy?

In the analysis of the concession speeches of the defeated candidates, the study is drawn on Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak's Critical Discourse Analysis. The first part provides an overview on political concession speech. The second one deals with the linguistic tools involved

in the construction of that type of speeches. The third one focuses on the link between political concession speeches and democracy.

1. An Inroad into Political Concession Speech.

Concession speeches have rarely been the interest of political discourse analysts. Post-election interests are concentrated on the elected candidate or the winner. Therefore, the defeated candidate as well as his concession speech are given little attention. According to R. Putri and Y. Yanti (2021: 37), a concession speech is “a term used in politics to describe speeches given by losing candidates after an election and after the overall vote”. In other words, it is a public recognition of the victory of an opponent.

P. Corcoran advocates the same opinion when he contends that “the concession speech is an institutionalised public speech act integral to democratic life and the legitimacy of authority. It has its own etiquette and symbolism, but the yielding and taking of power are also practical affairs”. (Corcoran 1994: 114). Even if through this assertion, it comes out that conceding defeat simply is a democratic principle, it should not be taken for granted to the extent that some losers may reject election results whose outcome could threaten peace and security of a nation. It implies that concession speeches derive from many implications.

1.1. Concession Speech in Politics: A Speech of Weakness or a Speech of Honor

The public recognition of a defeat may be a painful practice in the sense that the candidate who loses not only acknowledges his failure, but also declares the triumph of his opponent. Following P. Corcoran (1994: 110), defeat is “an unbearably public failure, a deep, still unexpiated inner sorrow and mortification-barely an hour old, must speak itself”. Corcoran’s statement implies that defeat comes with a sentiment of sorrow and disappointment. However, being courageous enough and concede defeat helps to construct a positive image of the loser. This is what comes out when P. Corcoran (114) declares that “the defeated candidate’s courage, in the ancient sense of virtue or manliness, is in doubt until he congratulates his opponent.” Thus, through the concession speech, the loser preserves his virtue and courage.

Far from being a simple skylight of congratulation in a context of defeat, concession speeches testify to a real state of mind of the defeated candidate and the projection in the future. Concession speeches, as public communications meant to publically concede one’s defeat, reveal many hidden aspects among which the social pressure. It can be admitted that conceding a defeat is not simply to please the winner but much more, a state of weakness facing a moral

constraint. In John Mahama's concession speech (2016), this gloomy reality is evidenced through the following terms:

- (1) A few minutes ago, I made the most important phone call I have made, and may ever make in my life: I called president-elect Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Ado of the new Patriotic Party to congratulate him on his well-deserved victory in Wednesday's election [...] Telling the world that I would graciously accept the outcome of the election was one thing, but confronting the stark reality of an electoral defeat is another harrowing experience altogether. But I had no option

In his opening discourse, Mahama highlights his moral constraint, and it appears that this speech is delivered against his own will when he pronounces the utterance "But I had no option." Having "no option" means being in a state of weakness as he faces a powerful group. In this respect, President Mahama's concession speech is the result of the promise to accept the verdict of the elections.

The promise to concede defeat in the election is a moral must to keep. This moral charge is also contained in the contrastive pair "A few minutes ago, I made the most important phone call I have made, and may ever make in my life: I called president-elect Nana Addo". This tactful language is a sign of weakness embedded in a moral pressure that constrains President Mahama to recognize his defeat in the public sphere. Concession speech, in this regards is a mark of honour because it derives from the conscious will of keeping one's word so as not to tarnish one's image or avoid tiff with the other members of the society.

1.2. From Concession to Political Maturity.

Concession speeches aim at respecting people will in elections. Because they are aware of the choice of the people, defeated candidates have a choice between contesting election results that is liable to social tensions, or conceding their defeats for the sake of political and social stability. Conceding stands as one way of respecting democracy and the choice of the people. It proves the political maturity of politicians, and poses as an instance of democratic language in which the utterer legitimates the winner and call for national unity and peace preservation.

- (2) Elections should **not divide us**. Elections are contests that come and go, but Kenya will always remain. I congratulate Kenyans for a peaceful election that has demonstrated to the world that **now Kenya has come of age**. (Kenyatta, 2013)

In the excerpt (2), Kenyatta points out his intention to take into account the results of the ballot boxes in order to maintain stability in the country. Instead of expressing dismay, Kenyatta implicitly accepts his failure at the election, to the extent that he finds the process normal, that is, without irregularities: "I congratulate Kenyans for a peaceful election that has demonstrated

to the world that now Kenya has come of age.” It can be noticed in Kenyatta’s terms that his acceptance of the results illustrates his respect of democratic good practices, hence his assertion that “now Kenya has come of age.” The time adverbial “now” contrasts with the anti-democratic practices in the past. It is a confession that makes him accept his defeat. In this respect, he shows political maturity which complies with the respect of the democratic verdict.

Moreover, the political maturity of Kenyatta is displayed in his vision of unity in the country despite his defeat. He shows his generosity of mind when he insists that “Elections should **not** divide us.” In other words, he advises not to destroy the foundations of the nation, because the present loser, might be the winner next time. He advocates that “Elections are contests that come and go.” He insists on the union of all Kenya’s people, because he thinks elections are insignificant as compared to the nation which remains an eternal common property. His speech for national unity is expressed through his congratulations to Kenyan citizens for having voted in peaceful conditions in the interests of the nation. Throughout this concession speech, Kenyatta proves political maturity. That quality is equally invoked in the conceding speech by President Mahama, former president of Ghana (2016):

- (3) I love the country that has given me the opportunity to serve in various capacities for nearly two decades and I would **not** do anything to undermine our democracy or threaten the peace we enjoy (Mahama, 2016).

In this extract of his speech Mahama calls for the preservation of democratic achievements so as to safeguard unity despite the defeat of his party. For him, not conceding his defeat means endangering democracy. His search of peace, and love of his country and fellowships become his major concern. This declaration amounts to President Mahama’s political mature: he knows the will of the people and democratic requirements which he does not intend to violate.

2. Linguistic Patterns in Concession Speeches.

Concession speeches are not simply discourses intended to accept one’s defeat. They are also woven around some linguistic patterns that vehicle emotions and sentiments. In this discussion, the constructions of two concession speeches hold the attention in the fields of pragmatics and grammar

2.1. Pronominal Use and Self-Disclosure in Concession Speeches.

Concession speech is an accomplishment associated with communicative purposes such as emotions, intentions or discussing future prospects. In this trend, as mentioned above, concession speeches reveal the state of mind of the defeated candidate through a particular use of linguistic items such as the person deixis as it can be observed in the following extracts:

(4) **I** take this early opportunity to congratulate **my** brother Raila on his election. **I** have been on phone with the president elect to express **my** support and that of my coalition. **I** urge all Jubilee supporters to work with the new president in moving our great country forward. (Kenyatta, 2013)

(5) **I** called President-elect Nana Akufo Addo Dankwa of the New Patriotic Party to congratulate him on his well-fought and well deserved victory in Wednesday's election. **I** would like to wish our president Nana Akufo Addo, the best of luck in his administration (Mahama, 2016)

E. Benveniste, (1971: 82) postulates that “the individual act of appropriating a language inserts the speaker into his speech act [...] this situation is evidenced by specific items whose function is to place the speaker in a constant and necessary relationship with his enunciation.” The recurrent use of the first person deixis “I” and its variant “my” in Kenyatta and Mahama’s speeches significantly points to themselves as speakers who address their audience from their personal.

In the point of view of Levinson (1983: 62), the analysis of deictic elements such as pronouns should be understood in terms of the way they are used in communication or discourse.

Thus, by means of the first personal pronoun singular ‘I’ the two presidents express their own acceptance of their defeat with fair play. The use of the first person deixis is a sign of the utterers’ conceding. They stand individual speakers who identified themselves in the election contest they lost. Using the pronoun ‘I’, they speak first of all on their behalf and share the responsibility of their words.

With ‘I’, the losing candidates make a formal declaration of their opponents’ victory. In such speeches, when they use ‘I’, the political leaders not only confess their defeat, but also take upon themselves their personal responsibility in their statements. The pronoun ‘I’ is used to posit losing candidates as people who honour their commitments before their addressees and public opinion. It can be considered as a mark of sincerity, commitment and acceptance to prove the recognition of election verdicts.

2.2. Pragmatic Items in the Construction of Concession Speeches.

Concession speeches offer not only moments of appreciation, but also a framework for future prospects. In line of this orientation, Chesebro and Hamsher (1974: 40) put that “The concession speech is the vehicle used to secure a new social relationship, it is intended to purify and redeem both sides.” Through concession speeches, politicians subtly tend to be counsellors pointing at their defaults and giving advice to the winner by the efficient use of speech acts to appreciate or warn.

Many types of speech acts are used by political leaders in order to declare their defeat concession. Two of them namely expressive and directive speech acts are particular interest, in this paper. Mahama and Kenyatta mainly employed expressive and directive speech acts to address the audience.

In excerpt (4) Kenyatta affirms: “I take this early opportunity to congratulate my brother Raila on his election” and similarly in excerpt (5) Mahama declares the following: “I called President-elect Nana Akufo Addo Dankwa of the New Patriotic Party to congratulate him on his well-fought and well deserved victory in Wednesday’s election”, expressive speech acts are used in both statements. These expressive speech acts vehicle the mind of the two speakers; reason why Norrick (1978: 279) considers them as speech acts expressing psychological conditions. Thus, the two defeated presidents use expressive speech act to congratulate the presidents-elect. In both cases, the presidents agree on the victory of presidents elect and expressive speech acts are the means by which losing candidates rally to the president elect.

Another category of speech acts commonly used in concession speech is directive acts. Directive speech acts are employed by losing candidate for positive self-presentation:

- (6) I urge Kenyans of all walks of life to remember that our unity is our strength, now and in the future. Once again, I congratulate the president elect Raila Odinga and wish him well on his new responsibility as president of our republic. (Kenyatta, 2013)
- (7) Fellow Ghanaians, before I end, I will like to wish our president-elect, Nana Akufo Addo, the best of luck in his administration. I will, however, like to caution him to be very careful in order not to repeat the mistakes I made in my administration. His success or failure depends on the kinds of people he appoints. He should focus on the people and not on the party. He should remember that after four years, Ghanaians will be demanding accountability from him. He and the NPP should remember that the shea butter that is gloating over the ill-fated salt because of a heavy downpour should fortify itself with ice before the sun rises. What has befallen us can befall you if you allow the intoxicating effect of power to blind you. (Mahama, 2016)

Extracts 6 and 7 reveal the positive image presented by both presidents to their addresses. The aim is not to tarnish their images in the face of public opinion. In (7), through directive acts, Kenyatta posits himself as a conciliator who invites Kenyan populations to provide the president elect with their support in the course of his term office. Likewise, in (8), Mahama identifies himself as a counsellor. By giving the reasons for his failure, he makes some suggestions to the president elect. The two losing candidates attempt to present positive face through directive speech acts. As a result, it can be said that the political leader who concedes his failure makes use of directives to skilfully express regrets and save his face.

The directive speech acts, as stated, are also meant to warn: “He should remember that after four years, Ghanaians will be demanding accountability from him. He and the NPP should remember that the shea butter that is gloating over the ill-fated salt because of a heavy downpour should fortify itself with ice before the sun rises”. It can be understood that, defeated candidates also give advice to the winner in the speech of concession. Through the advice, they warn the president elect to pay attention during his term if not he will fail.

Directive and expressive speech acts are pragmatic tools which are used in concession speeches to show credibility, sincerity and allegiance.

3. From Concession Speech to Democratic Entrenchment.

Conceding is to recognize one’s defeat and accept the verdict of the elections. The acceptance of elections’ results is an attitude which maintains confidence in the electoral process and promotes democracy

3.1. A fair-play Orientation for the Sustenance of democracy

Democracy is the people-centered form of governance. It emerges through competitive elections in which people choose their representative for a mandate. When the people are not satisfied with the achievements of the representative, the latter is sanctioned during the next election. As a result, the people decide to trust a new political leader. Thus, conceding defeat after elections amounts accepting to be respectful of the will of the people. In most cases, defeated candidates fail to acknowledge publically their failure. Contrastively, having the guts to recognize defeat likely strengthens the democratic game. This is the democratic teaching that former Presidents Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and John Mahama of Ghana attempt to deliver in their political concession speeches. The following excerpts corroborate this assertion.

(8) As you know, the people have spoken, and they have clearly said that my brother Raila Amolo Odinga is the 4th President of this great republic of Kenya. (Kenyatta, 2013).

(9) The people of Ghana have said emphatically that they are taking away the power they gave to me four years ago, and I have no power to say no. (Mahama, 2016)

In the illustration (1), Uhuru Kenyatta refers to the outcome of the election as the voice of the Kenyan people. Thus, as the loser of the election, he accepts to respect the will of the people who have chosen his ‘brother’ Raila Amolo Odinga as their new representative. His use of the term ‘brother’ expresses his wishes to advocate solidarity among the people of Kenya. That intention aims to prevent his country from going through post-electoral troubles. Moreover, Kenyatta privileges the interests and the choice of the people of Kenya over his personal and political interests. Such an approach offers great possibilities to enroot democracy because Kenyatta’s attitude implies that no one should go against the sovereign decision of the people.

In the excerpt (2), John Mahama is aware of the founding principles of democracy, as illustrated by his utterances: ‘The people of Ghana have said emphatically that they are taking away the power they gave to me.’ He recalls one of the democratic tenets according to which the power is attributed by the people whose decisions are not to be contested. From this democratic vision, Mahama realizes that he should not cling to power but accept the results of the ballot box. By taking into account the will of the Ghanaian people, he unveils political greatness that promotes a sustainable democracy in his country.

3.2. Acknowledging Defeat to Save Face for the Reign and Preservation of Democracy

Delivering a concession speech amounts to certifying that the candidate has failed to win the confidence of the people. Concession speech is most of the time transformed into confession ceremony during which the defeated candidate confesses mistakes that have caused his failure. The following lines display the confession of John Mahama after he failed to regain the trust of the Ghanaian people.

(10) I think that we lost because our time was simply up, and **no amount** of deceptive campaign promises could keep us in power. **No amount** of monopolization of the media space could save us (Mahama, 2016).

(11) **No amount** of money could stop our defeat. **No amount** of local and international celebrity endorsements could help us. And **no amount of vote buying** could stand the irresistible hurricane of change that shook our nation on Wednesday (Mahama, 2016).

The anaphoric use of “no amount” in excerpts (10) and (11) is an insistence to insist on democratic principles. He recognizes that democracy does not adapt to corruption and the support of people other than the voice of the people. It is a kind of confession that proves what was done in the preceding of the elections but which did not help him win. For him, the defeat is the result of the sanction of the population. Thus, the degree of disappointment has reached a level so high that nothing could bring the Ghanaian people’s trust back; therefore, there is no reason not to submit to the verdict of the people. Democracy is also to recognize the mistakes in policy orientation and accept the people’s sanction and this is what John Mahama is teaching in this concession speech when he says:

- (12) I will urge my party members to stop the “blamestorming” that has started so that we brainstorm on how to get ourselves out of the mess we have put ourselves in.

From this utterance, it comes out that this failure is a collective responsibility that all the members of John Mahama’s administration have to carry. The pronoun “we” illustrates that collective responsibility that excludes, as a consequence, any scapegoat. That fact of not rejecting the fault of this failure on others preserves democratic game and peace in the Ghanaian society. Indeed, it forestalls post-electoral unrests. This failure has taught John Mahama that they should not take the Ghanaian voters for granted. This is the reason why he confesses:

- (13) **I have learnt that** the Ghanaian voter, though mainly uneducated and simple, is more sophisticated than we thought. **I have learnt that** it is unacceptable for the people to loot, hoard and splash during elections (Mahama, 2016).

The expression ‘I have learnt that’ in the illustration (4) means that like many other political leaders in Africa, John Mahama was naïve enough to believe that the people are not capable of understanding political issues and the stakes of elections as well. He got regretful of the fact that he underestimated the Ghanaian voters’ abilities to make good decisions. This mea culpa conveys John Mahama’s sentiment of culpability and remorse. Implicitly, it is a promise to do better next time. Conceding defeat may be perceived as a sign of weakness, but it helps to sign a new political and social contract with the people, that is, the owner of power. Besides, it preserves unity and solidarity in the country. In their concession speeches, John Mahama and Uhuru Kenyatta did not fail to promote unity among their people. Their respective messages of solidarity can be perceived in the following utterances:

- (14) “Election should not necessarily divide **us**” (Kenyatta, 2013).

- (15) I urge Kenyans of all walks of life to remember that **our unity is our strength**, now and in the future” (Kenyatta, 2013).

- (16) “God bless **Kenya**” (Kenyatta, 2013).
- (17) “God bless **our homeland Ghana** and make **our nation** great and stronger”
(Mahama, 2016).

Through the inclusive markers in these excerpts, Kenyatta and Mahama intend to make their people know that it is no longer time for adversity. It is rather time for consolidating national unity and stability. It is an appeal to urge them to be more of a hindrance than a help to the presidents elect. Their messages read that more important than elections are the unity of the country. Thus, the quest for unity must always prevail.

CONCLUSION

Defeat is a moment of moral shock, dismay, disappointment and disillusion for losing candidates and conceding is not an easy exercise. It mobilises courage, moral commitment and the respect of democratic values. This study has revealed how political concession speeches aim to entrench the sustenance of democracy in Africa. The study has put the emphasis on the act of conceding defeat as a practice that involves a sense of honour and commitment. It pictures the losing candidates in a positive way, because after their failure they try to position themselves as self-face saviours, promoters of democracy.

Through their statements about their individual responsibility, these political leaders try to avoid tarnishing their images. Thus, the interest of this discussion resides in the use of linguistic strategies in the speeches delivered by Kenyatta and Mahama who display the political stakes of conceding defeat. In addition to the political context it describes, the study has shown that one of the strategies used by political leaders is based on the stakes of language.

As political leaders who lost elections, Kenyatta and Mahama do not simply give appreciation to their opponents' victory. More than that acceptance of their own defeat, they orient their discourse towards patriotic sentiments, unity of the country and the people, their desire for national stability and the respect of the will of the people are shown up in their speeches. Thus, a guarantee for a sustainable democracy also resides in the political leaders' speeches.

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