

A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PROFESSOR NAANA JANE OPOKU-AGYEMANG'S VICE-PRESIDENTIAL 'OUTDOORING' SPEECH OF 2024

Abraham T. Tei¹, Rachel G. A. Thompson², and Kofi Agyekum³

Abraham Tawiah Tei is an assistant lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Media Arts and Communication in Accra, Ghana.

Rachel Thompson is a senior research fellow at the Language Centre of the University of Ghana, Legon in Ghana.

Kofi Agyekum is a professor of ethnography of communication in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana, Legon in Ghana.

ABSTRACT

This study presents a linguistic analysis of the 'outdoorings' (ceremonial public introduction) speech delivered by Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, Ghana's first female vice-presidential candidate of a major political party. She was selected as the vice-presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress for the first time in 2020 and again in 2024. Drawing on political discourse analysis, the study examines her use of personal pronouns, modals, and rhetorical devices, including personification, simile, rhetorical questions, exaggeration, and innuendo. The focus is on the 2024 elections. The findings show that first-person and plural pronouns fostered inclusivity and commitment, and that rhetorical devices were used to enhance persuasion and subtly critique her political opponents. The analysis demonstrates how the speech built a leadership persona, reinforced collective solidarity, and affirmed party ideology. The findings also outline how this political language more broadly shaped public perceptions, mobilised citizens, and contributed to democratic outcomes. The paper advances the understanding of linguistic strategies in Ghanaian political communication and more generally the role of rhetoric in electoral contexts.

Keywords: political discourse analysis, electoral discourse, campaign speech, rhetorical devices, voter engagement

1  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0124-1416>

2  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7233-0242>

3  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6177-2819>

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in political communication. It influences people's decisions in choosing political parties or candidates. As Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012, p. 462) observed,

No matter how good a candidate's manifesto is, no matter how superior the political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, these can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and continuity through the facilities provided by language.

The above observation foregrounds language as the principal medium through which political ideas are articulated and enacted. In Ghana, the growth of multi-party democracy has generated scholarly interest in the study of political discourse. Examples include research by Agyekum (2004, 2013, 2015, 2017), Obeng (2002a, 2002b), and Thompson (2019, 2021), whose works have laid the foundation for understanding the relationship between language and politics in Ghana. Building on those earlier studies, the present paper examines the speech delivered by Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang at her 'outdooing ceremony' as the 2024 vice-presidential candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

The term 'outdooing' originates from Ghanaian traditional naming ceremonies, where a newborn is formally presented to the community. As Anarfi and Fayorsey (2000, p. 152–153) explained, such ceremonies are 'occasions to show the newborn baby to friends and ... the public[,] with a bit of fun and flair'. In Ghanaian political culture, this practice has been reinterpreted as a formal public event in which a candidate is introduced and endorsed by their party. The outdooing ceremony thus functions as a ritualised occasion that symbolises political and cultural unveiling, legitimises leadership, and projects party unity and public endorsement.

Within this context, the outdooing speech differs from an ordinary campaign address in both function and context. It forms a key component of the ceremony itself and articulates the candidate's legitimacy, values, and connection to the community. The speech delivered at the outdooing ceremony is thus not merely a campaign message but also a performative act of political and cultural introduction.

Political discourse encompasses communicative activities such as campaigns, slogans, manifestos, advertisements, and public speeches, all of which rely on language to persuade and mobilise audiences (Chilton, 2004; Wilson, 2001). In the framework of political discourse analysis (PDA), language is viewed as both a reflection and a constructor of political ideologies (Agyekum, 2015). Political

communication thus shapes voters' beliefs and guides decision-making (Jucker, 1997; Obeng, 2002a). Generally, speeches by politicians exemplify these dynamics through the careful use of language that builds rapport and inspires hope for national progress (Duranti, 2006; Obeng, 1997).

Against this background, the current paper investigates how pronominal choices and rhetorical devices were employed by Prof. Opoku-Agyemang to achieve persuasive and inclusive effects. The analysis reveals how these linguistic strategies positioned the speaker within Ghana's political landscape. The study also contributes to a broader understanding of political communication in emerging democracies. The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 provides background information on the NDC and a brief profile of Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang. Section 3 outlines the data collection procedures and the theoretical framework for the study. Section 4 presents the data analysis, and Section 5 presents the conclusion.

THE 2024 RUNNING MATE

The National Democratic Congress

The NDC is one of Ghana's two main political parties. A brief history follows. In 1981, the late Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings transitioned from the military-led Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) to democratic governance. The NDC was founded in 1992 after the ban on political parties was lifted. Rawlings went on to win the 1992 and 1996 elections, and these victories kept him in office until 2000. Since 2000, the NDC has alternated with the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in holding power.

Milestones for the NDC included the presidency of Prof. John Evans Atta Mills (2009–2012), the succession of John Dramani Mahama (2012–2016), and the contested elections in 2016 and 2020. In the 2024 elections, Mahama was the presidential candidate, and Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang was his running mate. The transcript of Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's outdoor speech, which formally introduced her candidacy, provided the data for this study. The event, while rooted in party strategy, also illustrated the broader patterns in Ghanaian political communication.

Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang is a distinguished academic and a political figure in Ghana. She earned her BEd in English and French at the University of Cape Coast, as well as a diploma from the University of Dakar and an MA and PhD from York University, Canada. She has held numerous academic leadership roles, including

Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast (2008–2012), and Chancellor of the Women’s University in Africa (2018–2024).

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang’s political experience includes moderating the 2012 presidential debates and serving as Minister of Education under President John Dramani Mahama. In 2020, she became the first female vice-presidential candidate of a major political party in Ghana; she was later reappointed for the 2024 elections. In that year, she gave her outdoor ceremony, symbolising her official introduction and a key moment in Ghanaian political culture. The analysis of her speech in this paper highlights her rhetorical strategies and political communication style.

METHODOLOGY

Data Source

The data were drawn from the first formal speech by Prof. Opoku-Agyemang as a vice-presidential candidate in the 2024 general election. She delivered her speech on 24 April at the University of Professional Studies, Accra, approximately six weeks after her nomination on 7 March 2024. The event was broadcast live across major television, radio, and social media platforms and was covered extensively in the national press. We selected her speech for analysis because it marked the candidate’s formal public introduction. An outdoor event provides a meaningful context for analysing political communication, as it is strategically significant for articulating ideology, projecting credibility, and mobilising voter support.

The data consisted of the complete transcript of Prof. Opoku-Agyemang’s speech. We examined both audio and textual versions of the speech to ensure accuracy. The final text for analysis was obtained from the electronic edition of a credible Ghanaian news platform, www.ghanaweb.com, which was selected for its reliability and consistency in political reporting (Thompson, 2021; Thompson et al., 2024). The written version enabled a systematic linguistic analysis of discourse markers, including pronominals, modality, and rhetorical devices.

Research Design and Analysis

We employed a descriptive, qualitative research design (Kim et al., 2017) to explore the communicative strategies used by Prof. Opoku-Agyemang. This approach adopts a naturalistic orientation and facilitates in-depth understanding of the language used in a sociopolitical context (Kim et al., 2017). It also provided the necessary flexibility to adjust the theoretical framework and analytical focus throughout the research process.

Each sentence of the speech served as a unit of analysis. Given the study's aim of identifying linguistic strategies, we examined both discourse markers and rhetorical devices. The analysis also considered both internal and external political factors that influenced the speaker's linguistic choices. The methodology allows for the recognition that words and speech acts are often deliberately selected and that such choices may be strategically made to gain a political advantage and reinforce a party's ideology.

Qualitative content analysis is a systematic approach that organises text into meaningful categories, aligned with the study's objectives (Schreier, 2012). Coding was conducted in four stages, adhering to established protocols (Krippendorff, 2004; Schreier, 2012; Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Each of the three authors independently examined the transcript to identify salient linguistic features. We then met to compare our observations and discuss the emerging patterns. Instances of pronoun use, modality, and speech acts (such as promises) were coded and interpreted in relation to the speaker's persuasive and ideological goals.

To complement the qualitative analysis, we used the tools WordTips and Microsoft Word Count to determine the frequency of pronouns, modals, and rhetorical devices. These quantitative insights supported our interpretive discussion. They helped to illustrate how certain linguistic features functioned to project identity, build solidarity, and persuade the audience within the Ghanaian sociopolitical context.

Political Discourse Analysis

The framework underpinning this study PDA. In the realm of political communication, politicians and their supporters use language at various forums to achieve their ideological goals and score political points. Researchers primarily use PDA to analyse political speeches, including campaign messages, slogans, inaugurations, outdoorings speeches, radio and TV panel discussions, and statements by political supporters. PDA facilitates examining any language encounter that has political intentions, goals, and ideologies. Both the text and its context are considered essential for determining whether the communication qualifies as political discourse. According to Agyekum (2015), Desouza (2018), and Fairclough (2003), such speeches can include social, religious, cultural, and philosophical ideologies, as long as the speaker's aim is to persuade voters and influence their political decisions.

Politicians worldwide use language to promise, apologise, and discredit their opponents in ways that favour their own causes (Agyekum, 2013; Agyekum, 2015; Chilton, 2004). Through a PDA lens, this study provides a holistic understanding of how Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's outdoorings speech reflected political ideology, intention, and social goals, which were designed to influence, persuade, and

win over political supporters. In the next section, we examine how pronominals, modals, and rhetorical features were used to advance the NDC's vision and ideology while strategically discrediting political opponents.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are a central feature in political speeches that index identification, ideological alignment, and relational dynamics with the audience (Beard, 2000). In the speech we analysed, 180 personal pronouns were identified. They were first-person singular (I, me, my); first-person plural (we, our, us); second person (you, your); third-person singular (he, him, his); and third-person plural (they, them, their). First-person plural pronouns were the most frequent, accounting for 47%, followed by first-person singular at 23%, second person at 17%, third-person plural at 8%, and third-person singular at 5%. The subsections below discuss the various forms.

First-person Singular (I, Me, My, Mine)

The speaker's use of first-person singular pronouns totalled 42 instances and served both grammatical and pragmatic functions. Grammatically, the pronouns appeared in the nominative (subject), accusative (object), and genitive (possessive) forms. Examples include 'I' (24 instances) in the nominative, 'me' (6) in the accusative, and 'my' (10) or 'mine' (2) in the genitive case. From a pragmatic perspective, these pronouns positioned the speaker in relation to the presidential candidate, the audience, and broad ideological commitments. For instance:

1. 'As I stated in my brief acceptance note on March 7, 2024, by re-nominating me, you have demonstrated your remarkable consistency and unwavering commitment to inclusivity and innovation.'
2. 'I have heard you share with the public your rationale for choosing me, again. I have found that very touching. Thank you very much; as the Gonjas express it with meaning: *ansan kushun*.'

In examples 1 and 2, the use of first-person singular pronouns acknowledges the presidential candidate directly, while signalling loyalty and gratitude. Even though the decision to renominate the speaker was made in consultation with the NDC's Council of Elders, the responsibility ultimately rested with the presidential candidate, which explains why she directed her appreciation to him personally. Furthermore, by incorporating the Gonja language – the native language of the presidential candidate – to express her gratitude, the speaker deepened her

cultural and emotional bond with him. This act of codeswitching reinforced their shared identity and party cohesion.

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang also employed 'I' to express her personal beliefs and commitments, as illustrated in examples 3 and 4. This use of the first person projected her reliability and personal responsibility.

3. 'I remain inspired by the fact that, as a people...'

4. 'I feel privileged to work with him.'

Furthermore, in example 5, the speaker shifted the focus from personal expressions to matters of political and state accountability.

5. 'John and I have agreed that whoever has participated in the plunder of the state must be held accountable.'

The above utterance aligned with the NDC's campaign message of integrity and responsible governance. It introduced the political dimension of justice and anti-corruption, indirectly contrasting the moral stance of the speaker's team with the perceived misconduct of their political opponents. Thus, the first-person singular pronoun served as a means to express political credibility and moral vision, going beyond mere personal sentiment.

In examples 6 and 7 below, the use of first-person singular pronouns demonstrated inclusiveness and solidarity with the audience. These aspects showed the speaker's awareness of collective identity, despite her role as a vice-presidential candidate.

6. 'My fellow Ghanaians across the political divide, please, please, please, I am not about to burst into a James Brown song! Let's show some respect to our citizens.'

7. 'I address you last because you are very special to me: come, I open my arms to welcome each one of you.'

These inclusions created a sense of unity and personal connection with the audience. The speaker emphasised that, although she was the vice-presidential candidate, she remained aligned with ordinary citizens. The phrase 'my fellow Ghanaians' exemplified the possessive 'my' as a rhetorical strategy of inclusion; it bridged potential social and political divides and reinforced national solidarity despite the competitive electoral climate.

First Person Plural (We, Our, Us)

The most frequently used pronouns in the speech were the first-person plural form, with a total of 85 instances. They included 'we' as the subject (32 instances), 'our' in the possessive form (34), and 'us' as the object (19). Given the context,

these pronouns demonstrated inclusivity, collective responsibility, and solidarity (Pennycook, 1994; Fairclough, 1989).

The referent of 'we' alternated between the NDC party, the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and the Ghanaian population. In examples 8 and 9 below, 'we' refers to the NDC party, demonstrating the speaker's sense of shared purpose and commitment to the nation's future.

8. 'The victory we seek as a party is to invite everyone to the onerous task of rebuilding a broken Ghana.'
9. 'So, as we mentioned several times during the 2020 campaign, we intend to implement the ONE MILLION CODERS PROGRAMME.'

Here, 'we' functions as both a grammatical marker of collectivity and a political instrument of alignment. By using 'we' to refer to NDC leadership, the speaker emphasised the party's cohesion, continuity, and readiness to govern. Example 9, in particular, connects the party's linguistic choices to concrete policy proposals in digital innovation and youth empowerment, reflecting the NDC's broad developmental agenda. Overall, the use of 'we' bridged ideology and policy and projected a collective image of competence and progressive governance.

In examples 10 to 12 below, the speaker shifted the referent of 'we' to the Ghanaian population as a whole. This usage implied national solidarity and civic engagement. These constructions blurred the boundary between politicians and citizens. The speaker positioned herself alongside the electorate, using the inclusive pronoun 'we' to evoke a shared struggle and collective resilience.

- 10 'We are not in ordinary times.'
11. 'I remain inspired by the fact that, as a people, we have faced terrible situations before.'
12. 'We must move to the level of encouragement, appreciation, and support of those who participate in the private sector, regardless.'

Politically, this shift situated her discourse within Ghana's collective narrative of overcoming adversity, appealing to people's empathy and patriotism. Furthermore, the modal 'must' in example 12 expresses moral urgency, which links the language to calls for economic inclusivity and reform. Similarly, the possessive 'our' and objective 'us' were pronouns that the speaker used to convey ownership and shared responsibility. Examples 13 to 15 are relevant in this regard.

13. 'And the world knows what we do with our resources when women prosper.'

14. 'The purpose is the opportunity to hold our country together.'
15. 'Please come join us in our town hall meetings.'

Collectively, these pronouns constructed a discourse of unity, shared purpose, and national belonging, consistent with strategies of positive identity formation in political communication (Allen, 2007; Jong, 2018). The focus on 'our resources' and 'our country' further tied the linguistic inclusivity to themes of economic management, gender empowerment, and participatory democracy. These were core elements of the NDC's campaign rhetoric. Hence, by merging grammatical inclusiveness with policy-oriented appeals, the speaker employed collective pronouns as persuasive instruments of political mobilisation and ideological framing.

Second Person (You, Your)

Second-person pronouns appeared 30 times in Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's out-dooring speech. Their use was strategically multifaceted: they referred variously to the presidential candidate, the audience, the ruling government, the Electoral Commission (EC), and citizens of Ghana. By using both singular and plural forms, the speaker directed people's attention, asserted her authority, and engaged with multiple political audiences. An example was as follows:

16. 'HE Ayebida President Mahama, please allow me to address you directly.'

In the above example, the expression 'allow me to address you directly' drew attention to the presidential candidate specifically. The phrase invoked respect and acknowledgement for his past leadership because of the use of the Akan honorific, *Ayebida*, which means 'he who has done it before'. This word also reinforced the candidate's legitimacy and evoked a continuity of leadership.

17. 'By renominating me, you have demonstrated your remarkable consistency and unwavering commitment to inclusivity and innovation.'

In example 17 above, the singular 'you' and 'your' again focus on Mahama alone. The singular 'you' functions rhetorically to strengthen the perceived bond between the vice-presidential candidate and the presidential candidate. In contrast, the plural 'you' addresses a broader audience and engages them as active evaluators of political conduct; this usage occurs in Example 18 below.

18. 'I don't know about you[.] but the image I get looking at the trench is that of a hole[.] in utter shock that anyone could believe it was intended as a thanksgiving gift to the Almighty, Invisible, God Only Wise.'

The 'you' in example 18 functions rhetorically to invite shared moral judgement, indirectly criticising the ruling government's perceived mismanagement. The colloquial 'I don't know about you' personalises disapproval and establishes a solidarity with citizens, while maintaining political civility. This subtle positioning enabled a critique that lacked overt attack. It aligned with the norms of respectful political discourse, as grounded in Ghanaian sociocultural values.

Similarly, in example 19 below, 'you' appeals to the electorate's ethical and communal consciousness. Here, the pronouns serve as persuasive devices. They connect moral reasoning to political responsibility and urge citizens to act beyond their partisan emotions and consider the broader social implications.

19. 'If you decide you don't like the owner, think of their worker who may be a member of your community, political party, or church.'

In example 20, 'you' has an institutional referent, namely, the EC. The repeated and direct terms of address here transform the speech act into a civic intervention, holding an autonomous body publicly accountable. Linguistically, the repetition intensified a sense of urgency. Politically, it served as a democratic oversight mechanism and positioned the vice-presidential candidate as both a participant and guardian of fair governance.

20. 'EC, I address you directly: it is in the national interest, and in your own interest, that you make transparent what has been and is going on at your establishment. The truth will not be suppressed. You cannot be so independent as to disregard the people who validate your existence.'

Subsequently, the speaker broadened her address to encompass the entire Ghanaian population, whether they were physically present, virtually connected, or would listen to the speech in the future. This shift is evident in example 21 below, where 'you' encompasses the broad Ghanaian citizenry.

21. 'I open my arms to welcome each one of you to partner with the NDC to envision and craft and roll out a future of limitless prospects; a future where your dreams and those of your children are attainable,

your voices are constructive, where your lives matter. This moment is for you.'

In this example, the pronoun becomes a motivational and inclusive appeal, inviting collective participation in nation-building. By blending the personal and plural references, the speaker frames citizens not as passive observers but rather as active partners in realising democratic ideals. In addition, the use of the word 'future', twice, could instil hope among the electorate.

Across these various uses, 'you' and 'your' operated as rhetorical tools for constructing relationships based on respect, critique, and collaboration. The singular forms expressed loyalty and interpersonal alignment within the party's hierarchy, whereas the plural forms built civic solidarity and moral accountability. Through these shifting terms of address, the speaker navigated Ghana's political terrain, thereby affirming her leadership, challenging institutions, and empowering citizens. Overall, the second-person pronouns enacted a politics of engagement. They linked language, ethics, and governance in the service of democratic participation.

Third-Person Singular (He, Him, His, Her)

Third-person singular pronouns in Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's speech were used in the nominative (he), accusative (him), and possessive/genitive (his) positions. They occurred eight times and referred exclusively to the presidential candidate, John Dramani Mahama. Such words served as a strategic evaluative device to convey admiration and trust in his competence, while also constructing a credible leadership partnership. Examples included the following instances:

22. 'I see it as a sign of strength, and I feel privileged to work with him.'

23. 'He thinks through what he says and considers advice; he is confident enough to amend his views when confronted by working alternatives.'

24. 'He does not rush with decisions that have serious effects on the lives of others. John Mahama does not shoot from the hip.'

Through these references, the speaker performed a deliberate act of political endorsement. The repeated use of 'he' and 'him' positioned Mahama as a reflective and consultative leader, with qualities that are valued in Ghanaian political culture. In Ghana, patience and deliberation are often framed as hallmarks of wisdom and maturity in governance (Asiedu-Appiah et al., 2016). The vice-presidential candidate's admiration was thus not merely personal but also rhetorical. It served to consolidate the voters' confidence in the presidential candidate's judgement and presented the NDC as a disciplined and united team.

Furthermore, by using these third-person forms rather than addressing Mahama directly, the speaker created a narrative distance that enabled an objective commendation. This linguistic strategy transformed her praise into testimonial authority; she expressed her views both as an insider and as an observer. Politically, this dual stance reinforced her credibility as a potential reliable deputy who recognised and supported capable leadership. Moreover, as Ghana's first female vice-presidential nominee, her evaluative positioning engaged with gendered expectations in political rhetoric. Her supportive portrayal of Mahama was aligned with traditional partnership norms, yet her confident and authoritative tone simultaneously redefined the female political voice as both loyal and discerning (Goyal & Sells, 2024).

Overall, the use of third-person singular pronouns not only served a grammatical or interpersonal function; it also had a political purpose. These pronouns helped build a leadership ethos and communicated intra-party harmony. They also aligned the presidential and vice-presidential candidates with public ideals about competence and moral integrity.

Third-Person Plural (They, Them, Their)

Third-person plural pronouns ('they', 'them', and 'their') appeared 15 times in Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's speech and served as key rhetorical resources for political positioning. Although the speaker rarely named her opponents explicitly, these pronouns referred mainly to the then ruling government and members of the NPP. Through indirect references, she critiqued the NPP while displaying rhetorical restraint. The reference to an implied entity enabled her to make accountability claims, without overt confrontation, and reflected a strategy of politeness that softened her criticism, while preserving the ideological contrasts (Obeng, 1997).

This use of pronouns constructed an implicit 'us versus them' dichotomy between the NDC and the NPP. By referring to her opponents indirectly, the speaker framed her political critique as a collective moral judgement rather than a personal attack, which reinforced the NDC's image as a principled and credible party. As Allen (2007, p. 3) observed, 'it is in the politician's interest to present themselves as multifaceted in order to appeal to a diverse audience, and careful pronoun choice is one way of achieving this aim'. Such a rhetorical strategy was evident in the examples below.

25. 'Do not fall victim to those who have realised that having failed in sloganeering and packaging, they have exhausted their strategies and therefore resort to deception and destruction.'
26. 'And at the time of accounting to the people, let no one pretend that

they have more human rights than those they have consciously disenfranchised and those to whom justice has been shamefully denied.'

In the above excerpts, 'they' refers to the then ruling party or its members, who are portrayed as deceptive and morally compromised. The pronouns allowed the critique to appear principled, as they distanced the speaker from making a personal attack and highlighted the contrast between parties.

Interestingly, third-person plural pronouns were also used in reference to Ghana's forefathers and foremothers. Used in this way, the words served a commemorative function. In the examples below, 'they' refers to historical figures, whose resilience and integrity are implicitly contrasted with the contemporary leadership and its shortcomings.

27. 'In those hard times, our forefathers and foremothers did not throw up their arms in despair.'
28. 'They fought back; they resisted, they sacrificed, they persevered; they brought back hope where there was none; they picked up the broken pieces and carefully, strategically, sewed them back, and they left for us a legacy of selflessness, patriotism, and pride.'

This dual usage of the same pronouns to refer to both political opponents and historical exemplars allowed the speaker to navigate between critique and celebration. It further constructed a moral and political continuum that situated the NDC within Ghana's historical narrative of collective struggle and renewal.

Overall, the pronouns 'they', 'them', and 'their' served multiple functions. When referring to the NPP, they implied political failure and moral deficiency; when referring to national heroes, they evoked patriotism, sacrifice, and ethical exemplariness. This dynamism enabled the speaker to criticise the present and valorise the past, reinforcing the NDC's legitimacy and moral positioning.

This section has established how the speaker's pronoun choices constructed political alignment and ideological contrast. The next section examines the use of modal expressions to show how she negotiated authority, commitment, and persuasion.

The Modal 'Will'

The modal verb 'will' evolved from Old English, where it originally functioned as a content verb that meant 'wish' (Larreya, 2009). Over time, it became an auxiliary verb, used to indicate future intention, determination, or commitment.

In this sense, it is often followed by a bare infinitive (e.g. ‘will share’, ‘will repay’, ‘will pursue’).

In political discourse, the use of ‘will’ allows a speaker to demonstrate their intent, reassure their constituents, and project their alignment with a party’s vision (Downing & Locke, 2006). In Prof. Opoku-Agyemang’s speech, ‘will’ appeared along with both singular pronoun constructions (‘I will’) and plural ones (‘we will’). These forms communicated, respectively, personal dedication and collective political commitment and are discussed separately below.

‘I will’ (Personal Commitment)

The first-person singular construction ‘I will’ functioned as a commissive act, in which the speaker pledged to fulfil her duties. This usage emphasises her individual accountability and integrity, aligning with her role as the vice-presidential candidate. Such statements perform commissive speech acts to demonstrate one’s trustworthiness, competence, and loyalty (Searle, 1979). Examples are as follows:

29.

- a. ‘I will share in our collective successes.’
- b. ‘I will repay your abiding confidence with loyalty.’
- c. ‘I will repay your abiding confidence with loyalty, understanding, and a devotion to duty.’
- d. ‘I will share in our collective successes and share responsibility for our setbacks, if any.’
- e. ‘I will not, in the advancement of self-serving ambition, declare to the world that I was only the driver’s mate.’⁴

In examples 29 (a)–(b) above, ‘I will’ reaffirmed the speaker’s commitment to both the presidential candidate and the audience, assuring them of her loyalty and their mutual responsibility. In 29(e), she asserted her readiness to assume full responsibility in governance. This statement countered remarks made earlier by the then sitting vice-president, who had described himself as ‘just the driver’s mate’, a metaphor that depicted his limited authority. The speaker’s expressions thus situated her authority within Ghanaian political culture, in which trust, loyalty, and visible dedication are highly valued.

‘We will’ (Collective Commitment)

The plural first-person form ‘we will’ shifted the focus from individual commitment to collective party and campaign commitments. This usage indicated

4 Driver’s mate: A Ghanaian expression for a bus conductor.

unity, shared vision, inclusivity, and alignment with the presidential candidate. Examples were as follows:

30.

- a. 'We will see how, from the vegetable seller to the miner; from the smallest hamlet to the crowded cities...'
- b. 'We will pay special attention to issues and challenges faced by women in all walks of life.'
- c. 'We will actively pursue the establishment of a Women Development Bank to nurture and grow women-owned, women-led businesses.'
- d. 'We will also undertake the modernisation of our markets, which remain special and dominant places for many women in the economy.'

These utterances constituted promises that articulated the party's social interventions and policy intentions (Searle, 1979, p. 23). These involved the party's focus on future developmental issues, such as women's empowerment, market modernisation, economic growth, and other national priorities. By using 'we', the speaker framed these initiatives as collective commitments, emphasising cohesion and reliability across the NDC leadership team. Politically, 'we will' also indicated her alignment with both the presidential candidate and the broader party agenda. The speaker thus demonstrated inclusive policy goals that resonated with gender, economic, and social development priorities. In Ghana's competitive multi-party context, projecting unity through 'we will' was a persuasive tool for building voter confidence.

Figures of Speech

Political speeches often contain figures of speech that are used for rhetorical and persuasive purposes. According to Gluckberg (2001), figures of speech and figurative language are used to convey ideas and hidden meanings in both daily conversations and public speeches. Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's outdoor speech exemplified this use of rhetorical devices. We identified six figures of speech, namely parallelism, personification, exaggeration (hyperbole), simile, rhetorical questions, and innuendo.

Parallelism

Parallelism involves the use of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that share a similar structure, sound, or meaning (Agyekum, 2013; Al-Ameedi & Mukhef, 2017). This rhetorical device is particularly effective in public speaking, as it enables speakers to highlight the connections between ideas while maintaining the audience's attention. Indeed, parallelism often features in political speeches as a persuasive tool to enhance both rhythm and clarity (de Albuquerque, 2013).

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang employed parallel structures strategically in her outdoor speech to reinforce her message of resilience, hope, and collective progress. In example 31 below, the phrase 'a Ghana' is used repeatedly, with a balanced structure, to construct a vision for the nation. The repetition emphasises the speaker's envisioned qualities for Ghana, and each clause sequentially builds a sense of national renewal, optimism, and forward momentum.

31.

- a. 'a Ghana that at the very least, can feed itself.'
- b. 'a Ghana that functions, again.'

Similarly, example 32 below shows a related pattern of [subject ('they') + verb phrase (past tense)]. Parallelism is also evident in the use of anaphora, with the pronoun 'they' honouring the collective efforts of Ghana's forebears during times of hardship.

32.

- a. 'they fought back',
- b. 'they resisted',
- c. 'they sacrificed',
- d. 'they persevered',
- e. 'they brought back hope where there was none',
- f. 'they picked up the broken pieces and carefully, strategically, sewed [them back]',
- g. 'they left for us a legacy of selflessness, patriotism, and pride'.

The referent of the pronoun in example 32 above is 'Ghana's forefathers and foremothers', which is inferred from the context. The forward movement to reveal the meaning is particularly evident in clause (g). The parallel structure not only highlights the achievements of the forebears but also cultivates a sense of resilience, national pride, and unity among the audience. Furthermore, clauses (e) and (f) employ contrastive expressions to illustrate the positive outcomes of the forebears' actions. The crescendo of verbs culminates in the legacy statement in (g), reinforcing collective memory and patriotism.

Prof. Opoku-Agyemang further used parallelism to emphasise inclusivity and broad societal coverage. In this context, the '24-hour economy' policy – an initiative aimed at extending economic activities beyond conventional working hours – is presented as benefiting everyone across the country. The 'from ... to' parallel structure in example 33 below highlights this wide-ranging impact, suggesting that the policy extends to citizens across different geographic locations and social groups.

33.

- a. 'from the smallest hamlet to the crowded cities.'
- b. 'from the farmer to the fisherfolk.'
- c. 'from the young couple to the single parent; everyone will come to see and apply the benefits of a nation, group and individual advancement.'

Parallelism was also employed through imperative structures, with the speaker using 'let' to issue a call to action. At the same time, 'let' reminds one of important events that should not be overlooked. These uses are evident in example 34 below. Both statements challenge the audience to confront injustices, while also emphasising urgency, civic responsibility, and unity in the face of adversity.

34.

- a. 'Let no one tell us that the culture of silence has become the norm',
 - b. 'let no one tell us that eight persons were not shot in cold blood ...'
- Finally, parallelism framed Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's aspirational vision for Ghana. She used repeated 'where' clauses to articulate her ideals, prefaced by 'We want a country'. This structure, evident in example 35 (a)–(f) below, constructed a vivid picture of an ideal society. The repetition reinforced hope in a just and equitable nation, inspiring the audience to strive toward these goals.

35.

- a. 'where equality thrives',
- b. 'where equity is paramount',
- c. 'where merit counts',
- d. 'where opportunity is not a privilege',
- e. 'where justice is just',
- f. 'where our sons and daughters can aspire to any height without the fetters of bias or limitation.'

In summary, Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's use of parallelism enhanced both her rhetorical clarity and her persuasive power. She employed repetition, balanced structures, and anaphora to communicate national ideals and commemorate past sacrifices, while also motivating collective engagement. Overall, parallelism was a central feature of her rhetorical strategy.

Personification

Prof. Opoku-Agyeman employed personification as another rhetorical device in her speech. Politicians often employ personification by attributing human

characteristics to inanimate objects, common events, or abstract concepts to persuade their audiences (Boonchuay, 2022). Scholars agree that personification helps convey complex ideas in relatable terms. It can transform abstract concepts to tangible entities in ways that enable an audience to connect with the speaker more deeply (Pamungkas et al., 2024). Prof. Opoku-Agyeman personified both Ghana and specific initiatives in the following examples.

36. 'To heal Ghana.'

Example 36 suggests that Ghana has the capacity to experience being sick and to feel pain, as well as the capacity to recover, much like a human being. The phrase implies the need for care, thereby evoking empathy among the audience and citizens. By framing the nation as an entity that can be healed, the speaker invoked a collective responsibility to contribute to its recovery.

37. 'A free SHS [senior high school] at war.'

In example 37, the SHS initiative was depicted as engaged in a battle to redeem itself from many challenges. Through the technique of personification, Prof. Opoku-Agyeman drew attention to the challenges faced by the educational system. She also evoked in the audience a sense of determination to rally behind the efforts of confronting these challenges and adopt strategies to overcome them, just as warriors strategise to win a war.

38. 'Our country is not sitting pretty.'

In the above expression, the speaker indicated that the nation was actively facing challenges. The use of this personification invited the audience to acknowledge the urgent need for action and change. Essentially, the personification was a persuasive tool to encourage the audience to consider the NDC as a viable alternative to the NPP for governing the country.

39. 'Our beloved country can rise again ...'

Through the above evocative personification, Ghana was portrayed as a resilient entity that is capable of standing and springing back after a fall. This imagery suggests that despite the challenges it faces, the nation possesses an inherent strength and determination that can lead to its recovery and growth. Prof. Opoku-Agyeman tapped into this sentiment, instilling a sense of optimism and resilience within the audience. She persuaded citizens to actively participate in uplifting

the nation from its struggles. Her emphasis signalled that collective effort was needed for a brighter future.

40. 'Ghana will rise again and this time, not to slack.'

She reinforced her vision with the above declaration. This statement affirmed the possibility of transformative change and characterised Ghana as a nation that was not merely capable of recovery but was also determined to emerge stronger than before. The personification of the nation rising, 'not to slack', adds a significant layer of determination and ambition.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole, also known as exaggeration, plays a crucial role in political rhetoric. It can evoke emotions, persuade, and draw people's attention to critical issues (Connor, 2019). As Braim (2014, p. 66) explained, politicians use hyperbole 'to make images and matters bigger and more important on the part of the audience so as to convince and direct them to a particular aim, for example, to vote for their own benefit.' The following examples illustrate how Prof. Opoku-Agyeman employed hyperbole in her outdoor speech.

41. '[I]t is about the chance to pull Ghana from the precipice of destruction.'

This statement employed hyperbole by suggesting that Ghana was on the brink of absolute collapse. The phrase 'precipice of destruction' conveyed an image of imminent disaster and hopelessness, creating a sense of urgency that would compel the audience to recognise the severity of the situation. Such language amplifies the stakes involved and implies that failure to act urgently or now could lead to serious consequences.

42. 'It is to embrace everyone in building a Ghana that functions, again, Ghana from the precipice of destruction.'

The repetition of 'from the precipice of destruction' reinforces the earlier use of hyperbole, emphasising the critical state of the nation. The statement also suggests that the current situation is so dire that collective effort is the only way to prevent disaster.

Overall, the vice-presidential candidate positioned herself as a leader who understood the critical situation facing the nation and presented herself and her party as holding the panacea or solution. Her use of hyperbole in this context made it clear that the stakes were not merely high but potentially catastrophic.

The intention was to motivate citizens to engage in a combined effort to achieve national recovery.

Simile

Simile is a figure of speech that explicitly compares one thing to another using the words 'like' or 'as'. Akram et al. (2022) noted that the vivid imagery created by similes can enhance the audience's understanding and make complex ideas more relatable. Politicians often use similes to describe situations and characterise events (Obeng & Hartford, 2008). In a relatively long statement based on parallel structures, in example 43 below, Prof. Opoku-Agyemang employed simile to illustrate the nature of some political systems in Ghana.

43. 'The promotion of

- a. ethnocentric elitism masquerading as intellectualism;
- b. nepotism cloaked as know-how;
- c. weakness strutting as courage; and
- d. crony capitalism masked as development in freedom;
- e. shameless hypocrisy acting as objectivity'.

Her use of phrases such as 'nepotism cloaked as know-how' and 'weakness strutting as courage' depicted how superficial appearance sometimes obscured deeper truths in the country. The contrast between 'shameless hypocrisy' and 'objectivity' emphasised the betrayal felt by citizens when they realised that what should represent truth was, instead, fraught with deception. The use of simile in this manner can invoke strong emotional reactions by creating striking or sensational images in the minds of the audience. It motivates the audience to demand accountability and integrity from their leaders and can sway public opinion effectively.

Rhetorical questions

In the course of her delivery, Prof. Opoku-Agyeman highlighted specific events in relation to both electricity supply and the EC that she considered disrespectful to citizens. She then posed two rhetorical questions:

44. Hey! What is that?

45. How did disrespect grow such wings?

Rhetorical questions serve as a potent rhetorical strategy to engage one's audience and provoke thought, without expecting an explicit answer (Blankenship & Craig, 2006; Downing & Locke, 2006). The first question, 'What is that?' invited the audience to ponder the significance of the situation being addressed. This

rhetorical question created a moment of pause and encouraged listeners to reflect on their own perceptions and experiences. The speaker sought their engagement as she drew the audience into the discourse, so that they would become active participants rather than passive recipients of information.

The second rhetorical question, 'How did disrespect grow such wings?' suggested that disrespect had taken on a life of its own. Through the metaphor of 'growing wings', the speaker implied that disrespect had become pervasive and insidious, spreading rapidly and perhaps uncontrollably. The figure of speech here emphasises the urgent need for collective action against certain sociopolitical issues in the country.

Innuendo

Innuendo is an indirect act of speech, as it is used to imply a meaning rather than stating something outright. The meaning is often inferable from the context or tone, or from knowledge that is shared between the speaker and the audience (Thompson & Agyekum, 2016). Politicians often use innuendo to subtly criticise or attack their opponents without direct confrontation. In Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's speech, innuendo was strategically employed to critique her opponents. For instance,

46. 'I will not, in the advancement of self-serving ambition, declare to the world that I was only the driver's mate.'

In example 46, she implied that certain political figures may downplay their past roles to present a false image of humility and advance their political interests. This is an indirect critique of the opposition's tactics and motivations. (The phrase was also discussed in example 29 above.) Additionally, in example 47 below, the speaker employed innuendo to accuse the opposition (NPP) of resorting to negative campaigning after they failed to deliver substantial policies during their eight years in office.

47. 'Do not fall victim to those who have realised that having failed in sloganeering and packaging, they have exhausted their strategies and therefore resort to deception and destruction.'

The phrase 'deception and destruction' indirectly refers to the opposition party, without explicitly naming it, to provide a cautionary note to the public. Hence, innuendo allowed the speaker to criticise the opposition indirectly. Through this technique, she maintained a level of plausible deniability while shaping the audience's perception of her rivals (Obeng, 2002b).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang's outdoor speech as the NDC's vice-presidential candidate for Ghana's 2024 general election. The outdoor speech, as a culturally significant genre in the Ghanaian political landscape, provides a public ritual of political introduction. It is where identity, ideology, and legitimacy are first negotiated with the electorate, making it particularly revealing as a political strategy to garner votes.

Our study was based on PDA. The findings have demonstrated that political language served both as a means of communication and as a strategic instrument for persuasion, identity construction, and mobilisation. Furthermore, as a female Ghanaian scholar and politician, Prof. Opoku-Agyemang used rhetoric that acquired symbolic importance within Ghana's patriarchal political landscape. Her speech projected competence, inclusiveness, and moral authority. It challenged gendered assumptions about leadership, while affirming national unity. Through her deliberate use of pronouns, modals, and figurative language, she constructed a leadership persona as well as collective solidarity, reinforcing the NDC's image as a people-centred and forward-looking party.

The potential causal impact of the speech cannot be identified based on the qualitative methodology we employed. However, the NDC's eventual victory in the 2024 elections suggests that the speaker's rhetoric resonated with voters and contributed to broader narratives of change and inclusion. This study illustrates how language can be used deliberately as an instrument in a political campaign, where every word is carefully chosen to influence and engage the electorate. Discourse and rhetoric are central to Ghana's political process. Language is not merely a medium of communication but also a vehicle for persuasion, mobilisation, and change. Our analysis indicates that discourse and rhetoric continue to play these powerful roles in Ghana. Prof. Opoku-Agyemang's speech demonstrates how language can function as a potent tool for shaping voters' perceptions and strengthening their participation to influence democratic outcomes.

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