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Losing with Words: A Study of Synonymic Choices in Selected Concession Speeches

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Abstract: This paper investigates the strategic use of synonymous forms by defeated presidential candidates in their concession speeches. Studies on language and politics have focused essentially on campaign speeches, manifestoes and inauguration speeches with little attention paid to the speeches made by defeated candidates to concede defeat at the end of the electoral process. Therefore, this study focuses on the concession speeches of three defeated presidential candidates across Africa with the aim of revealing how they concede defeat through the use of lexical synonyms. The data for the study consists of excerpts from the concession speeches of Rupiah Banda of Zambia (2011), Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Nigeria (2015), and John Dramani Mahama of Ghana (2016) and it adopts lexical relation of synonymy as its framework. The findings reveal that that synonymic lexical choices are indirect means of conceding defeat in post-election speeches by defeated presidential candidates. It also reveals that defeated presidential candidates employ lexical synonyms in their concession speeches to portray a positive self-representation to launder their image as a face-saving device and to portray their love for their countries and as a means of obeying the voice of the people through the ballot.

Keywords: Political discourse, concession speeches, lexical relations, synonyms, election

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INTRODUCTION

In various discourse domains, distinct lexemes are used to accomplish specific objective for a speaker or writer. These objectives may be inferred rather than expressed clearly. They can only be inferred from a speaker's or writer's linguistic decisions. This suggests that a user's linguistic choices disclose both the nature and the motive of the discourse he or she is engaged in. When these lexemes are mixed, the degree of connectedness between them reveals the meanings and reasons behind such usages. Lexical or sense relations are the terms used to characterize this relationship between or among words (Maledo, 2018). Some lexical relations in a particular speech may include those of synonyms (sameness), antonyms (oppositeness), collocations (co-occurrence), hyponyms (inclusion).

Through the deployment of lexical elements, all of the previously indicated relationships are reflected in political discourse genres. Considering the foregoing and the concession speech that serves as the study's foundation, this essay investigates and clarifies the lexical relation of synonym synonym in the concession speeches given by former presidents John Dramani Mahama of Ghana (2016), Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Nigeria (2015), and Rupiah Banda of Zambia (2011). It is aimed at investigating how failed presidential candidates use a variety of synonymous forms to relate the contents of their concession speeches and express their intense feelings. The study's objective is to pinpoint these synonymic choice and explain their significance in

the chosen concession speeches. Additionally, the research deconstructs the complicated web of choices that exposes the difficulties in political communication.

Political Discourse

Any language, communication, and rhetoric used by politicians to share their individual and in-group views, programs, and ideologies with the public is referred to as political discourse. It includes a variety of communication formats, such as news conferences, political debates, speeches given during inaugurations or victories, manifestos, and concession speeches, to name a few. Levenkova (2011: 423) asserts that political discourse is a "linguistic expression of public practice in the sphere of political culture, which is the professional use of language which is based on the nationally and socio-historically conditioned mentality of its speakers." Also, Valerevna and Rakhmatovna (2022: 88) see political discourse as the totality of all speech acts used in political discussions as well as rules of public policy, sanctified by tradition and proven by experience." The language used in such political discourses can be altered to create a particular effect and sometimes to achieve some mischievous gains. This is the primary reason why discourse analysts from diverse fields of knowledge such as political science, sociology, and linguistics believe that political discourse is always ideologically contextualized.

In line with the above, Johnstone (2008: 54) opines that every choice is strategic in the sense that every utterance has an epistemological agenda, that is, a

way of seeing the world that is favored via that choice and not via others. This means that in all political discourse, the choice of lexemes employed is closely tied to the ideology of the speaker or speaker's group. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) affirm that "language has been a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders' they manipulate the tool to suit their purposes" (as cited in Mwinwelle *et al.*, 2019, p. 12). Defeated politicians tend to craft their concession speeches tactically to suit their interests. They skillfully use a wide range of lexical items that have the same or similar meaning to deliver their message during this heartbreaking and tragic moment.

The Concept of Conceding Defeat

A defeated candidate's decision to accept defeat and the accompanying humiliation is worrisome. Nonetheless, a lot of unsuccessful presidential candidates frequently support such acts to advance peace. Concession speeches are a subset of political speeches that are typically given in a depressing tone. Similar to the last scene of a creative work of art, it denotes the finality of any election process. Like in a drama, there is usually a great deal of tension leading up to the finish. Corcoran (1994, p. 111) buttresses this point that "in the theatre of modern election campaigns, the curtain rises for the final act on a cheering throng paying tribute to its defeated candidate." Such a tragic end is usually communicated to the audience by the defeated candidate to formally end the electoral process. However, admitting defeat is typically a ruse; as such, it purposefully misleads or rather hides one's actual goals. It is done through the use of crafty language, tactically woven together to probably gain sympathy and draw support from the audience for further actions in the future. Again, such intentional use of language recounts and represents the defeated candidate's experiences.

Mwinwelle *et al.* (2009, p. 12) opine that concession speeches are "speeches delivered by political candidates upon electoral defeat." In the same vein, Osisanwo and Chinaguh (2020, p. 272) describe concession speech as a rather "default response of disappointment and painful feeling." As disappointing and devastating on delivery of such a heartbreaking speech, there tends to be no constitutional legal backing for it. It is therefore not obligatory for a defeated candidate to deliver a concession speech. Notwithstanding, its timely delivery is a notable instrument in any democratic setting. It tends to contribute to the peaceful transition of power especially from a defeated incumbent to a declared winner without any form of post-electoral violence. It therefore invigorates and strengthens the democratic values of a country.

The above is supported by a review of the 59th US presidential election, which took place on Tuesday, November 3, 2020, in which Republican nominee Donald Trump refused to concede the election to

Democratic nominee Joe Biden. This highlights the critical need for prompt concession speeches. There were rumors that on January 6, 2021, during the joint session of Congress to ratify the Electoral College, Trump's followers attacked the US Capitol building in Washington, D.C. This emphasizes how important concession speeches are as a necessary component for preserving and advancing democracy. Trump officially conceded defeat and acknowledged the incoming administration on January 7, 2021, even though post-election violence was already endangering the democratic environment. With this action, Trump became the first American presidential contender to be defeated and still refused to accept the victor's title.

Again, in Nigeria, there were tendencies of post-electoral violence after the 2023 Presidential election. This was due to the absence of a concession speech after Senator Ahmed Tinubu was declared the winner of the Presidential election. Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples' Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party challenged and petitioned the outcome of the Presidential results. The political space was highly tense with issues that the court had to clarify. The Supreme Court finally gave its verdict in favour of the already sworn-in – President, Ahmed Bola Tinubu. The 2015 Nigerian presidential election, in which incumbent President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan conceded defeat even before the results were announced, cannot be compared to the two situations described above. This singular act debilitated the already tense political atmosphere. It puts an end to any attempt at post-election violence which many believed would have brought about the collapse of Nigeria as a country.

It is pertinent to note that the content of a concession speech usually ends the electoral process. This is because the protagonist usually congratulates the declared winner. However, the semantic signifiers of conceding defeat are not found in most concession speeches. Corcoran (1994, p. 115) points out that "the words 'concede' or 'concession' are never uttered by defeated candidates; 'defeat' and 'loss' are virtually banished." This suggests that concession speeches are nothing more than well-reasoned lies that console the losing candidate. By employing appropriate vocabulary, these remarks also serve to mitigate the impacts of the silent civil war of campaigns. The grandiloquent concession speeches are carefully constructed using lexemes that share some intralinguistic similarity to enliven and broaden the realization of meaning. Thus, this focuses on the synonymous lexical choices made by some failed presidential contenders in their surrender statements.

Lexical Relations: Linguistic framework

Lexical items in a language enter into relations of meaning and such meaning relations seem to link structures in a text (Ayeomoni 2007: p 30). It can also be argued that the meaning of a word in a text can only be

adequately described through its semantic relations and contrasts to other words in the text (Maledo, 2019). The vocabulary of a text contains some lexical systems the semantic structure of which can be described in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations and these relations hold between lexical items (Lyons 1968: p. 443) such relations help to group lexical items in a text as a series of semantically related options from which a coherent text can be constructed (Maledo, 2021). The study of lexical relations gives a means for describing and explaining relations between or among words in a given discourse. It is concerned, according to Yule (2010, p. 117), with the characterization of the meaning of each word not in terms of component features but in terms of its relationship to other words." Such relationships are manifested through the type of relation that a lexeme has with other words in discourse. Words combine to make meaning through the principles of combination (syntagmatic relation) or association (paradigmatic relation). Within the syntagmatic axis is the chain that deals with collocational relations while the paradigmatic axis focuses on the axis of choice concerned with antonyms, synonyms, hyponyms, and metonyms among others. From the axis of choice, this study examines the lexical relation of synonyms in concession speeches.

Synonyms

Synonym is used to mean "sameness of meaning" (Palmer 1981: p. 88). It is a lexical relation in which different words have similar meanings to the extent that one can be substituted for the other in certain contexts (Maledo, 2019). This sameness of meaning does not mean that the words should be interchangeable in all contexts but where synonyms are substituted, there should be no changes in the propositional content of the sentence (Carter, 2012). According to Syal and Jindal (2016: p. 146), two or more lexical items can be synonymous if "they have the same denotative, connotative and social meaning and can replace each other in all contexts of occurrence." However, this cannot be very realistic as the contexts may differ which may also altercate meanings. This problem contributes to the different classifications of synonyms. Yadugiri (2006: p. 141) argues that when words are so identical in meaning that they are interchangeable in all contexts, they are called total or strict synonyms.... But words that can substitute for each other in a varying range of contexts are termed as loose synonyms." In real essence, words cannot replace each other in different contexts without loss of meaning. This propels Yule (2010: p. 117) to posit that the "idea of sameness of meaning is not necessarily total sameness. There are occasions where one word is appropriate in a sentence but its synonym would be odd." He also notes that synonymous forms may also differ in terms of formal versus informal uses.

Nevertheless, Lyons (2009: p. 148) argues that the distinction between synonymous forms is drawn from the descriptive, expressive, and social meanings. He

distinguishes complete and absolute synonyms. He maintains that "complete synonyms are interchangeable in a certain range of contexts while absolute synonyms can be replaced in all contexts of occurrence." Lyons (2009) however affirms that complete synonymy of lexemes is relatively rare in natural languages and that absolute synonymy is almost non-existent. These arguments propel Crystal (2008: p. 470) to give a perfect solution of what constitutes synonymous forms. He asserts that "linguistic studies on synonyms have emphasized the importance of context in deciding whether a set of lexical items is synonymous". He further affirms that synonymic relations can be said to occur if items are close enough in their meanings to allow a choice to be made between them in some contexts. This assertion is used as a yardstick to consider if two or more lexemes are synonymous in the selected concession speeches for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study consists of concession speeches of three African presidential candidates who conceded defeat after they contested in presidential elections. They are President Rupiah Banda who contested the 2011 presidential election in Zambia, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who took part in the 2015 presidential Election in Nigeria and President John Dramani Mahama who participated in the 2016 presidential Election in Ghana. The speeches were sourced online and twenty-three excerpts that manifest instances of lexical synonyms relevant to the focus of the study were identified and extracted as data for analysis. The analysis was done in three sections with each section focusing on a particular candidate. The particular lexical synonyms in each extract are italicized for ease of identification by readers.

Data Analysis

Synonyms in President Rupiah Banda's Concession Speech

President Rupiah Banda was elected as the 4th President of Zambia who served from 2008 to 2011. As an incumbent president, he contested the 2011 Election but lost to the opposition party candidate, Michal Sata. Not satisfied with the outcome of the election, he has to concede defeat and in his concession speech, he employs pairs of synonymous lexical items as a subtle way of conceding defeat as shown in the discussions that follow.

The people of Zambia have spoken and we must all *listen*. Some will be happy with what they have *heard*, others will not.

The above excerpt is a subtle way of conceding defeat through the synonymic relation between the lexical items *listen* and *heard*. In this context, *listen* implies that the speaker has no option but to obey the spoken words of Zambians through the ballot. In the second sentence, the speaker disassociates himself from those who *heard* the unspoken words of the ballot and

are happy. He has to *listen* (accept defeat), though he is not happy. *Listen* in this context has the semantic implication of “to obey” or “to heed”. Its contextual synonym, *heard*, has the semantic implication of “perceive”. Ordinarily, “listen” denotes to pay attention to sound or speech while “heard” means to perceive sounds through the ear. There is a slight difference between these two lexical items. They cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. The use of these two lexical items helps to create a lexical tie which makes the discourse cohesive. The speaker employs these two near-synonyms to politely accept the outcome of the election. A similar usage of contextual synonyms is observable in the excerpt below.

Treat those you have *vanquished* with the *respect* and *humility* that you would expect in your own hour of *defeat*.

The lexical items *vanquished* and *defeat* and *respect* and *humility* are contextual synonyms and subtle ways of conceding defeat in President Rupiah Banda’s concession speech. They cannot be used in different contexts interchangeably without the loss of meaning. The word *respect* signifies an attitude of consideration or high regard. Equally, *humility* denotes being less arrogant and modest. The speaker employs the two words to guide the winners not to be too proud in their jubilation but rather to be humble and considerate in their celebration. Also, the lexical items *vanquished* and *defeat* are used by the speaker as near-synonyms. *Vanquish* stands for “to defeat” while *defeat* is akin to “vanquish”. The use of these lexical items is a kind of lexical reiteration for emphasis. However, they are not always interchangeable in every context. “Defeat” typically implies a loss, often with a sense of finality while “vanquish” often carries a more dramatic or emphatic tone, implying a complete and decisive triumph over an opponent. In a similar vein, *expect* and *hope* are contextual synonyms in I know that all Zambians will *expect* such behavior and I *hope* it will be delivered.

Expect denotes “to believe that something will happen” while *hope* signifies “to want something to happen with a sense of expectation”. The two lexical items are used to avoid unnecessary repetition. The speaker uses both words for emphasis to buttress his point in the expression.

We never *rigged*, we never *cheated*, we never knowingly abused state funds. We simply did what we thought was best for Zambia.

The words *rigged* and *cheated* are near-synonyms in the context of the above excerpt. *Rigged* means to manipulate something dishonestly for personal gain, especially the results of an election. Similarly, *cheated* means violating rules by trying to gain an advantage from a situation. Both lexical items have elements of manipulation for personal gains. They are

therefore not only related but they equally justify the type of discourse through the selection of vocabulary. President Rupiah Banda as an incumbent President contesting for the 2011 Presidential Election has what it takes to manipulate the result when it was obvious he was losing but he did not subvert the ballot nor did he the results. Thus this is a subtle way of telling Zambians that he accepts defeat even though he had the power to do otherwise. It was indeed a humble defeat which he tearfully conceded.

Zambia deserves a decent democratic process. Indeed, Zambia must build on her past victories. Our independence was *hard won* and our democracy *secured with blood*.

The expressions *hard won* and *secured with blood* share the same semantic properties. *Hard won* means difficult to win and *secured with blood* denotes very difficult to win. However, they are not interchangeable in all contexts. The speaker believes that the fight for independence was severe, harsh, and very brutal. It will be recalled that Zambia gained independence in 1964 after being ruled by the British for a long time. Kenneth Kaunda who is regarded as a nationalist leader that fought against the colonial masters was the first President of Zambia from 1964 to 1991. The use of the two expressions is a form of reiteration to lexically bind the speech together. Furthermore, in the excerpt below, *a good campaign* and *a good message* have synonymous semantic implications:

We fought a *good campaign*. It was disciplined. I still believe we had a *good message* and we reached every part of the country.

The lexical item “good” modifying “campaign” and “message” is a repetition to emphasize. “Campaign” and “message” have similar semantic scope in the context of elections. Every campaign is a message or information encoded to listeners or the populace who will decide the fate of the contestants. The message is equally information. The two lexical items are therefore related though not identical. The speaker employs these near-synonyms to buttress how his political party worked tirelessly to win the elections. He employs the near-synonyms as a means of encouragement for all those who worked with him.

In the excerpt below, President Rupiah Banda also uses synonyms to concede defeat and give way for a new government in Zambia:

My generation, the generation of the independence struggle – must now give way to *new* ideas; ideas for the 21st century. From this defeat, a new, *younger* MMD will be *re-born*.

The words *new*, *younger*, and *re-born* are used synonymously to concede defeat without stating so

directly. The speaker foregrounds this by recognizing that his generation which is the generation of the independent struggle must give way for the new generation. The speaker employs these words as near-synonyms for emphasis and to avoid repetition. These words are therefore lexical ties that make the speech string together as a coherent whole. The lexical item “new” means recently made, and the word “younger” means born not long ago while “re-born” implies given birth to again. These words emphatically depict the speaker’s perception of his political party which is quite old. It should be recalled that this political party, Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) has been in power from 1991- 2011. Again, most members of this political party are nationalists who joined in the struggle for Zambia’s independence in 1964. The speaker believes that one of the reasons he lost to Michael Sata was because his political party had been in power for too long. The people of Zambia yelled for a change because they believed that MMD was archaic and therefore lacked innovative ideas to pilot the affairs of the country. Thus, he uses the lexical items *grow* and *flourish* in the excerpt below to align himself with the wishes of the people by accepting the result of the election:

In my years of retirement, I hope to watch Zambia *grow*. I genuinely want Zambia to *flourish*. We should all want Zambia to *flourish*.

Both lexical choices represent development in the context of usage. The speaker believes in the growth and development of his country, Zambia despite losing the election. The use of these synonyms helps to build a lexical connection within the speech. The ideology behind the use of these synonymous words is that of patriotism. The speaker earnestly desires the progress and development of Zambia. This is a face-saving technique and a usual characteristic of concession speeches according to Corcoran (1994, p. 115).

In the extract below, the speaker concedes defeat politely by stating obviously that he is not angry with the result of the election:

I have *no ill feeling* in my heart, there is *no malice* in my words. I wish him well in his years as president.

The expression “ill feeling” stands for hatred while “malice” also denotes deep hatred. Being modified by the adverbial negator “no”, it implies that the speaker has no intentions of contesting the result of the election in court as is the norm in most African countries. Thus, it is a subtle way of conceding defeat. The use of these synonyms depicts the ideology of sportsmanship. The speaker demonstrates politics devoid of bitterness rather; he extends an olive branch to the winner in the spirit of sportsmanship. The acceptance of defeat is made more obvious by President Rupiah Banda in the excerpt below:

But now it is time for me to *step aside*. Now is the time for a new leader. My time is done. It is time for me to say ‘*good bye*’.

Presented in a parallel form, the expression *step aside* denotes making room for others as a replacement by withdrawing from a position or service while *goodbye* stands for farewell or departing from a position or service, or place. Their synonymous nature is made prominent through the use of parallelism in the speech. The speaker uses the two expressions not only to emphasize his departure from the apex position in Zambia but more importantly to concede defeat in the just concluded election. As an incumbent, he did not subvert the outcome of the election rather he allowed the due process of a free and fair election. This is very novel in the history of African Presidential Elections. The ideological implication of the use of *step aside* is that of patriotism as well as sportsmanship. An ideal leader would listen to the voice of the people especially to avoid post-electoral violence.

Synonyms in Goodluck Ebele Jonathan’s Concession Speech

In the context of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, the incumbent, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan also conceded defeat. The choice of the synonymous lexical item in his concession speech is worth examining, I *promised* the country a free and fair elections. I have *kept* my word the lexical items *promised* and *kept* are contextually synonymous. The word ‘promised’ signifies a vow or an affirmation or to assure. To keep to one’s word equally implies to uphold or to retain it. There is an identity of reference between the two lexical items. Therefore, the expression *I have kept my word* helps to reiterate the word *promised* earlier mentioned. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan used the words *promised* and *kept* in the expression *I promised the country a free and fair elections. I kept my word* as synonyms for emphasis. Through the use of such synonyms, the speaker displays rich vocabulary which facilitates a coherent organized speech. The speaker, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan advocates for transparent elections which should not be manipulated. He maintained and kept his promise.

President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as an incumbent President contested the 2015 Presidential Election against the candidate of the All Progressive Party (APC), General Muhammadu Buhari. The speaker loses to the APC candidate. He conceded defeat even before the conclusion of the announcement of results by the Independent National Electoral Commission. The former President emphasizes the accomplishment of his promise with the singular act of not interfering with the electoral process thereby producing a free and fair election. The ideology behind this act of keeping his promises is that of patriotism. The speaker identified a national flaw in Nigerian politics where elections are not usually free and fair. He therefore worked towards

improving it by conducting an election devoid of any interference. This implies that the speaker loves and respects constituted authorities and has the interest of the country at heart. Despite conceding defeat even before the end of the election, he knows some people are not happy and he employs synonymous lexical items to express this:

Although some people have expressed *mixed feelings* about the results announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), I urge those who may feel *aggrieved* to follow due process based on our constitution and our electoral laws in seeking redress.

The expressions *mixed feelings* and *aggrieved* are near-synonyms. “Mixed feelings” is a reaction caused by perplexity or confusion while *aggrieved* implies someone feels pain or sorrow. In the context of usage, the expression *mixed feelings* is a cataphoric reference to the lexical item *aggrieved*. The supporters of President Goodluck Jonathan had mixed feelings and were also aggrieved about the outcome of the result as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The speaker however feels satisfied with the outcome of the election as he makes this obvious in the excerpt below:

I urge those who may feel aggrieved to follow due process based on *our constitution* and *our electoral laws*....

The two phrases ‘our constitution’ and ‘our electoral laws’ in the above expression have similar semantic properties. They are both laws established in Nigeria for the proper conduct of governmental and individual actions and therefore are near-synonyms. The speaker displays the ideology of respect for constituted authorities and the rule of law as a patriotic citizen.

As I have always affirmed, nobody’s ambition is *worth* the blood of any Nigerian. The unity, stability and progress of our dear country is more *important* than anything else.

In the above, *worth* and *important* have the same semantic implications. Their meanings vary according to different contexts. *Worth* refers to something that has value while *important* depicts something having relevance and crucial value. The ideology behind the use of these synonyms as reiteration is that the speaker portrays his affirmation of selflessness and super-patriotic personality which is rare in the Nigerian political space. *Peaceful* and *violence-free* are also synonymous lexis used by President Jonathan to concede defeat:

I also commend the security services for their role in ensuring that the elections were mostly *peaceful* and *violence-free*.

In the above, *peaceful* and *violence-free* have the same semantic implications. “Peaceful” denotes being inclined to peace, likewise, the term, “violence-free” denotes the rejection of violence by seeking to bring change through peace. From his concession speech at the end of the election, the speaker, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, can be described as a man of peace devoid of any tendency to application of violence for selfish interest. In the excerpt below, he dwells briefly on one of the major achievements of his administration:

For the past 16 years, we have steered the country away from *ethnic* and *regional* politics.

Ethnic and *regional* are related in meaning. They are near synonyms or alternative forms of each other. The word “ethnic” implies a group of people having common racial, ancestral, national, religious, or cultural origins while “regional” denotes a place without special reference to location but viewed as an entity for geographical social, or cultural reasons. They are both subdivisions of a country or territory. The speaker employs both terms to underscore one major focus of his administration and by reference, he urges the winner of the election to eschew ethnic or regional politics.

From the above, it is clear that President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, like President Rupiah Banda, also employs synonymous lexical items in his concession speech to concede defeat and to achieve the textual meta-functions of language – cohesion.

Synonyms in President John Mahama’s Concession Speech

Another concession speech worth considering concerning the use of synonymous lexical choices is that of President John Mahama of Ghana during the 2016 general election in Ghana. He sees elections as battles and contexts:

Every *election* is a hard-fought *battle* and this one was no exception. For those of us who choose to be contenders and go into electoral *contests*, we go about it as a win-lose proposition.

In the above, the lexical items *election*, *battle*, and *contest* are all contextual synonyms. The word “election” denotes a process of choosing a leader, or other representatives by popular vote. “Battle” refers to a general action, fight, or encounter in which all the contenders may be engaged in combat. Also, the word “contest” means to contend/strive in opposition. These lexical items are all reiterations that share the same semantic properties of opposition and struggle. They are therefore similar in meanings in the context of usage. Their meaning may vary in different contexts. The speaker, President John Mahama contested for the position of the President of Ghana. The contest was a fierce battle between the two close opponents; President

John Mahama and Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana in 2016. The speaker uses these lexical items as near-synonyms to avoid unnecessary repetition. All of the lexical items used by the speaker tie in their near sameness in meanings. Specifically, *battle* concerning the election has an ideological implication. The ideology is that of “war”. The election was fierce and intense competition between the two major contenders who were political rivals. The speaker, as an incumbent, had earlier defeated the declared winner, Nana Akufo-Addo in 2012 scoring 50.70% as against his opponent who scored 47.74%. Also, it should be recalled that Nana Akufo-Addo rejected the results alleging that the election was rigged by the speaker. He therefore petitioned the Supreme Court to nullify the election. The court passed its verdict in 2013 in favour of the speaker, President John Mahama. So, with this understanding, the speaker sees the 2016 Presidential Election as a declaration of war against his major opponent. However, he jettisons this idea of war as he swears to uphold a smooth and peaceful transition in the excerpt below:

With this understanding, I would like to assure the people of Ghana of my commitment to the sustenance of our country’s democracy and would work to ensure a *smooth* and *peaceful* transition to the incoming administration.

The words *smooth* and *peaceful* are synonyms. The word “smooth” denotatively refers to a process without difficulty or problems. In this context, it means the absence of violence. This is similar to the denotative implication of “peaceful” which is to be inclined to peace by avoiding war. The speaker deliberately employs these lexical items that share similar meanings to demonstrate his philosophical ideology of inclination to peace as a patriot. He speaks about a transition without violence. Even as the incumbent President, he has the authority to nullify the election hence it is not in his favour but he rather sues for a peaceful transition of power to the new administration which will be led by the winner of the just concluded election, Nana Akufo-Addo.

Likewise, I would like to thank the members of my administration for their diligent service and for bringing to *fruition* many of the plans we set out to *accomplish*- the numerous programs that have been *implemented* and the infrastructural projects that have been *completed* and ongoing.

From the above, words such as *fruition* and *accomplish*, and *implemented* and *completed* are all synonymous in the context of usage. The word “fruition” means the state or quality of being fulfilled, completion, and realization. “Accomplish” denotes to finish successfully or to complete. “Implemented” means to accomplish and to achieve while “completed” means to finish or to reach an end. These lexical items are used for reiterative and cohesive purposes. The speaker uses this series of synonyms to portray positive self-presentation

to launder his image as a face-saving technique. Again, the use of the word *fruition* is a philosophical term for growth and development. The speaker believes in his government-rendered developmental projects (both the ones that are completed and those that are still ongoing).

I wish to thank my able Vice President Kwesi Amissah Arthur for his unflinching *support* and *loyalty* during our periods in office.

In the above, support and loyalty are contextual synonyms. “Support” means to offer help. It also denotes to back up or be loyal to a cause. Similarly, the word “loyalty” stands for undivided and constant support for someone or something. From the meanings, it is obvious that there is a semantic tie between these two words. Both share the semantic feature of constant help or backup. The speaker uses these words to signify his appreciation to his Vice President Kwesi Amissah for the undivided support he gave to him.

... for standing as firmly with me through the times of *challenge* and *difficult* as they have through the times of *achievement* and *promise*.

In the above, the speaker uses the words *challenge* and *difficulty* as synonyms. The word “difficulty” in this context denotes a hard problem that requires a lot of effort to solve. In the same vein, “challenge” means a difficult task. Also, “achievement” and “promise” are near-synonyms. “Achievement” denotes accomplishment or a successful performance while “promise” in this context signifies success. The speaker appreciates his family members for their enormous support during tough times. The use of the synonyms in the excerpt is basically for emphasis. In the next excerpt, the speaker uses *Ghana*, *home* and *a powerful nation* to refer to his country Ghana as a way of showing his endearing love for his country:

Ghana, this land that we call *home*, is *a powerful nation* with the history of taking the improbable and making it possible.

The word “Ghana” is the name of a country, and “home” refers to one’s dwelling place. It is also a place where a person was raised or childhood or parental home. Again, the word “nation” is a historically constituted stable community of people formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, ethnicity, and common culture. The speaker as a citizen believes Ghana is his ancestral home. He uses the synonyms to convey an inclusive identity; thus, portraying a positive image of his home. The speaker employs these diverse lexemes to create variety and to show his love for his country. The implication of all this is that he concedes defeat out of his love for his country. It is this love that is enunciated in the following excerpt which hints at his disagreement with the result of the election:

So I pray that we move forward, even as we voice our *differences* and possibly even *disagree* on agendas and decisions...

Here, *differences* and *disagree* are contextual synonyms. “Differences” in this context denotes disagreements or arguments while “disagree” means to have different opinions or beliefs. This goes a long way to underscore President John Mahama’s real feelings and thoughts about the election: there are differences and disagreements but he wants the country to move forward, hence accepting defeat.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to identify and analyze the synonymic choices in the concession speeches of three defeated presidential candidates: former President Rupiah Banda of Zambia, former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Nigeria, and former President John Dramani Mahama of Ghana. The paper highlights the role of such synonymous forms in creating an organized meaningful discourse. It also reveals the political contexts of the selected concession speeches. It has shown that synonymic lexical choices are used as a means of conceding defeat in post-election speeches by defeated presidential candidates. The study has also revealed that defeated presidential candidates employ lexical synonyms in their concession speeches to portray a positive self-representation to launder their image as a face-saving device. It has also shown that apart from fulfilling the textual metafunctions of language by enhancing cohesion in the texts, such synonymic lexis has implications for the interpersonal functions of language. The three presidential candidates studied in this paper use lexical synonyms to endear themselves to their country and to the people who have spoken through their votes. They are also used for creating effect through emphasis. Through the use of such contextual synonyms, the defeated presidential candidates concede defeat indirectly without saying so. Thus, listeners and readers are left to infer from such speeches that defeat has been conceded. Such speeches and such lexical choices go a long way to forestall post-election violence.

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