



## A Lexico-Thematic Analysis of Selected Speeches of Former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan

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**Abstract.** Political speeches have been studied from different linguistic orientations such as stylistics, pragmatics, lexico-semantics and discourse analysis. Analysing a political speech using a lexico-thematic approach is novel. This research carries out a lexico-thematic analysis of selected speeches of a former Nigeria President Goodluck Jonathan. Ten topically and purposively selected speeches of Goodluck Jonathan constituted the data for the research. Eight speeches were drawn from Jonathan's (2013) *Determination Unspeakable: A Collection of Speeches*, while two came from *The Nigerian Tribune* of 12 November, 2014 and *The Guardian* of April 1, 2015 respectively. The speeches were subjected to qualitative linguistic analysis using the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar. The Systemic Functional Linguistic considers the relationship between language and its function in social settings. It was discovered that Goodluck Jonathan's speeches reiterated five main thematic preoccupations which centered on 'peace', 'faith', 'progress', 'patriotism', and 'transparency', and these themes were skillfully wielded through a careful selection of synonymous lexical relations to project and emphasize the consistent messages in the sampled speeches.

**Keywords:** Lexico-thematic analysis, President Goodluck Jonathan, speeches.

### 1. Introduction

The place of language in politics cannot be overemphasized. It remains the only viable facility for propagating political ideas and activities. The relationship between politics and language is to such

an extent that without the first there cannot be the second. That is the observation of Agbogun (2011) when he suggests that languages are used in dealing with political terrain such that, it now becomes political language. Gee (2011:7) further corroborates this when he says that 'language is always political' and 'social goods are the stuff of politics'. By this, it means that language is used as a cord of connection in political instances. Since the primary function of language is communication, it therefore becomes a manipulative tool in the hands of politicians that can be used to elicit the right responses. That is why Akinkulere (2011) submits that the support that the citizens have for the politicians will be determined by what they say and how they say it for success to be achieved in candidacy, programme or politics. Language presents every politician the opportunity to exploit the resources available through language to use words to suit their intensions.

The study of political speeches is fast gaining ground in discourse. Agbogun (2011) explains political speech to be a faculty of observing, in any given case, the available means of persuasion in reference to any subject. Taiwo (2009) notes that the study of language of politics has been carried out within the framework of political rhetoric, linguistic-stylistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. This paper interrogates selected speeches of Goodluck Jonathan to expose his tangible and recurrent thematic manifestations.

### 2. Empirical Review of Literature

In stylistic analysis, lexis and themes are two distinct linguistic features, although they are intertwined.

While lexis is ‘the stock of words in a given language’ (Jackson and Amvela 2000: 11) and to a large extent, suggests the subject of any text, theme is a term in literary studies devoted to the study of central idea of a piece of writing. Obviously, meaning is derived from the choice of words a writer has made. According to Crystal (1987:77), lexico-thematic analysis focuses ‘on the several aspects of the way language is used to identify the various themes, characters, setting, plots and viewpoints which are introduced into the text’.

In this research, an exploration into the lexico-thematic analysis of selected speeches will be carried out, taking into consideration the contextual elements that constrain the thematic choices. As posits by Ezekulie (2014: 15), ‘there is ... a mutual and profound affinity between language and thematic goals’. This is in line with Odeunmi (2001:1) who notes that ‘context is the spine of meaning’. He contends further that ‘it is extremely difficult to proceed on any reasonable search for meaning without considering contextual pressure on word usage’. This is why it will be necessary to touch on the subtle deployment of lexical items to reiterate the themes in the selected speeches. Reiteration simply means saying or doing something several times. Reiteration as a lexico-semantic device is also a cohesive element in discourse. It manifests in repetition, super-ordinate, hyponym, and synonym or near synonym.

Halliday (1994) defines a theme as what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message. The theme can be said to be the underlining idea(s) a writer is trying to convey to an audience. In other words, it is the central/main message, topic, or point of a story, essay, or address. It ranges from a wide area of ideas such as love, war, desire, fate, togetherness, sacrifice, atonement, relationship between man and technology, and so on and so forth. There are two types of themes. These are the major themes and minor themes. Major themes are the more essential and consistent themes of a piece of writing. All other themes revolve round the main/major themes. Major themes are significant in that they run through the lines of the narrative or speech. On the other hand, minor themes are the less important and less consistent themes in the narrative or speech. They only provide points of discussion for the development of paragraphs and chapters. Just as in a narrative, themes have unparalleled importance in a speech.

The theme serves as the thrust or imports of a written piece. It constitutes the meaning behind the entire write-up. It is the real essence of what is written and

the main message a writer is passing across. Themes offer language that unifies the points in the speech, pulling the words together. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 60) say the link between expressions and themes are ‘conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events and other instances of phenomena’. They argue further that ‘this classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon’. Halliday (1970) refers to theme as a line of nails on the wall. The contents of the texts are carried along the nail line. He argues further that theme is ‘what the clause is about’, and no matter what the author wants to talk about, he must arrange the relative information around the topic in a logic order, with the thematic structure arranged distinguishingly according to the specific genres and aims.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The preferred linguistic model in this research is the Systemic Functional Linguistics, which was pioneered by Halliday (1978). The Systemic Functional Linguistics is the study of the relationship between language and its functions in social settings. It is a model that sees language as social semiotic, which is how people use language with each other to accomplish everyday social life. The Linguistic model proposes four theoretical claims about language which are of vital interest to this research: that language is functional, that its function is to make meaning, that these meanings are influenced by social and cultural context in which they are exchanged and that the process of using language is a semiotic process, a process of meaning by choosing. The summary of the four points is that language is functional, semantics, contextual and semiotic, hence a ‘functional-semantic approach’, Eggins, (2005).

### 4. Research Methodology

Ten purposively and topically sampled speeches of Goodluck Jonathan constituted the data for the study carried out in this paper. The speeches are: the acceptance speech as acting President and Commander in Chief of Armed Forces delivered on 10 February, 2010; declaration of intent for the 2011 Presidential race delivered on September 5, 2010; declaration speech for the 2011 race delivered on 18 September, 2010; acceptance speech following declaration as winner of 2011 Presidential election

delivered on 17 May, 2011; inaugural speech delivered on 29 May, 2011; Nigeria's 52<sup>nd</sup> independence anniversary speech delivered on 1 October, 2012; new year speech delivered on 1 January, 2013; Nigeria's Centenary Anniversary speech of 4 February, 2013; speech delivered on the occasion of the intent to run for 2015 Presidential election on 11 November, 2015 and concessional speech delivered on 26 May, 2015. These speeches have been labeled A – J systematically for ease of reference. The first eight speeches were drawn from Jonathan's (2013) *Determination Unshakable: A Collection of Speeches*, while the last two were culled from the *Nigeria Tribune* and *The Guardian Newspapers*. After a thorough reading of the speeches, a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the addresses was carried out by identifying the reiterated lexical items which illustrate the themes and the messages of the writer. The reiterated expressions were then grouped and analysed using the Systemic Functional Linguistic Model.

## 5. Analysis

Goodluck Jonathan deliberately deploys some lexical items to reiterate consistent themes in his national broadcasts. In order to provide a clear focus for the analysis and discussion, the choice of lexical items is analysed in line with the following themes of his speeches: unity, peace, faith, progress, patriotism and transparency. It becomes clear that some lexical choices made by Goodluck Jonathan are to project the theme of national unity and. This theme runs through the sampled speeches not only to subtly reinforce his acceptance as the circumstantial president but to also emphasise and foreground the place of unity in national development. Examples:

*Today affords us time to reconnect with ourselves...* (A)

*I call you today to join me to work together in harmony and synergy to forge a nation where we understand our differences instead of pretending they do not exist and work towards perfect union founded on transparency, equity and justice.* (B)

*I stand before you today, humbly seeking your support for me, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, to run for the office of the president of Nigeria with Architect Namadi Sambo as my running mate.* (C)

*We shall recreate a great nation welded in unity and harmony; a nation marching towards collective progress in which no one is left behind.* (D)

*I call upon all the presidential candidates who contested with me to join hands with us as we begin the transformation of our country.* (F)

*Let us therefore resolve ... to place the higher interest of national unity, peace, stability and progress above all other considerations.* (G)

*The one Nigeria consciousness which has kept us together is what we must safeguard.* (H)

*We must never forget our common bond, one people from the womb of one Nigeria.* (I)

*The unity, stability and progress of our dear country are more important than anything else.* (J)

The underlined synonymous lexical items such as reconnect with ourselves (unite), join, work together, harmony, synergy, understand our differences, perfect union, welded in unity and harmony, collective progress, no one is left behind, support, unity, join hands, work together, keep us together, common bond, one people, the womb of one Nigeria are tactically deployed by Goodluck Jonathan to repeatedly state the theme of national unity, cohesion, togetherness, oneness and cooperation among the people. This is necessary in the face of ethno-religious and political crises rocking the country. In other words, the repeated words function as an important aspect of Goodluck Jonathan's message to the nation.

Another major theme of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in the selected speeches is peace. In all the speeches, there is no where he was not found talking about peace, one way or the other. He was probably aware that peace remains the anchor on which the overall development of the country is hinged, without which the country is going nowhere. Examples:

*Government will endeavour to sustain the peace and find a lasting solution.* (A)

*My immediate task and priority was and still remains to give the nation purposeful leadership and focus on the priorities of our administration in order to maintain national peace and stability.* (B)

*I have offered myself to lead a country that will engage them in mutual respect and cooperation for the achievement of international peace and understanding.* (C)

*I enjoin our political and religious leaders in their sense of patriotism to call their followers to eschew all acts of bitterness and violence.* (D)

*I believe that peace is a necessary condition for development. (E)*

*Fellow Nigerians, in recent times, we have witnessed serious security challenges in parts of our country. We have taken pro-active measures to check the menace. (F)*

*As peace and security remain prerequisite condition for the full realization of our objective, we will also do more in 2013... (G)*

*I see a united, peaceful and prosperous nation in the horizon. (H)*

*I see a Nigeria where those who have taken up arms, would again embrace peace. (I)*

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

From the above extracted sentences, Goodluck Jonathan did not mince words to state again and again that his preoccupation as the President is to maintain peace. This is expedient in the spate of religious, ethnicity, political and insurgency bedeviling the peaceful coexistence of the nation before and during the time he assumes the presidency. No wonder that he persistently dwells on the issue of sustaining, maintaining, embracing and ensuring peaceful nation that is stable and prosperous by eschewing all acts of bitterness and violence, and checking the menace. This issue of peace cuts across all the sampled speeches because he recognised the fact that without peace it would be difficult for him to govern the nation successfully. He therefore saw the need to appeal and sue for peace both nationally and internationally, in order for him to have a successful tenure.

Another important theme which Goodluck Ebele Jonathan touches upon in the selected speeches is that of faith. There are two ways of looking at faith; someone's belief, principle and opinion, and of course religion. It will be discovered that the subject of faith does not enjoy a spanning development in the sampled speeches. This is intentionally done in order to avoid the delicate and explosive issue of religion in Nigeria. Whenever the issue of faith is mentioned at all, it is to advocate unity of purpose and action in the interest of national progress. Examples:

*I urge all Nigerians as a people of faith in God, to pray fervently for the full recovery of our dear president and his early return. (A)*

*Please let us all unite across tongue and creed to move our long suffering nation forward together. (B)*

*We have, by this election, reaffirmed our unity as one nation under God; reiterated our faith... (D)*

*I also wish to pay tribute to our founding fathers, whose enduring sacrifices and abiding faith in the unity and greatness of our country, laid the foundation for the nation. (E)*

Recognizing the fact that there are different religious groups in the country, Goodluck Jonathan preaches oneness in 'B' in order to move the country forward. This is in spite of individual's religious affiliations. He solicited prayers for his ailing boss from different religious organisations in 'A', while in 'D' and 'E', he acknowledged the confidence and trust the people had in the election and in the unity of the nation.

In addition to the above exemplified themes, there are also lexical items reiterating the theme of progress in the selected speeches. This theme stylishly portrays Goodluck Jonathan as a progressive person who is willing to move the nation forward. There are ample examples across the sampled speeches.

*Our march towards vision 20-2020 is irreversible. (A)*

*I have busied myself with setting Nigeria on the path of peace and progress. (B)*

*The progress we seek for our country is in our collective hands. (D)*

*The pivotal task of this generation is to lift our fatherland to the summit of greatness. (E)*

*We are working hard and making progress on many fronts. (F)*

*I say it again, we are determined to continue to push forward. (G)*

*We have no choice but to continue to work hard at building a powerful, cohesive, inclusive and progressive country that will remain the pride of all Nigerians and the black race in general. (H)*

*We have to move forward! Only forward!!! My dear country people, forward. (I)*

*The unity, stability and progress of our dear country are more important ... (J)*

In the excerpts from the data, the word ‘progress’ or its variants feature in all but one speech. This establishes the fact that one of the cardinal goals of Goodluck Jonathan in his message to the people is the progress of the country. He emphatically let the people know that progress is sacrosanct. That is why the issue is either ‘irreversible’ (A) or ‘important’ (J). He did not only say it again (G), but he busied himself with it, that is committed to it (B). In ‘A’, he says our march (our progress) is irreversible. In ‘B’, he preoccupied himself with setting Nigeria on the path of progress. In ‘D’, he enjoins everyone to lend a hand in the progress of the country. In ‘E’, his pivotal task is to lift (advance/move up) the nation to summit of greatness. In ‘F’, his administration is working hard and making progress. In ‘G’, he is determined to push forward (progress). In ‘H’, his government has no choice but to maintain a progressive country. In ‘I’, it becomes imperative to move forward and this is repeated three times. Lastly in ‘J’, the progress of the country becomes more important than anything else.

Another theme of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in his selected speeches is patriotism. His emphasis on patriotism, however, is largely to salute certain individuals or groups for actions of courage and patriotism. In very few instances, he also enjoined the people to display acts of patriotism to the nation. Whichever way, it is apparent that Goodluck Jonathan cherishes patriotism as an element of national development. Examples:

*In following the extant provision of the 1999 constitution to arrive at this decision, the leadership and member of the National Assembly have demonstrated great courage, statesmanship and patriotism. (A)*

*We confronted those moments and their challenges to national security with patriotism and care. (C)*

*Together we will build a new economy that is strong and dynamic and underpinned by a patriotic work. (D)*

*Stories of courage and patriotism were repeated in many ways ... (E)*

*The worthy patriots who made this possible were young men and women in their twenties and thirties. (F)*

*Let me extend my personal appreciation to the patriotic Nigerians. (H)*

*Without the quick action of patriotic Nigerians in the First Consultant Hospital... (I)*

Through patriotism and diligence, we have built the biggest and most patriotic party in Nigerian history. (J)

In winning the support of the people, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan consistently acknowledges and commends the spirit of patriotism, loyalty and commitment shown by Nigerians in times of national challenges. ‘A’ and ‘C’ salute the patriotism of security personnel in keeping the peace in the trying periods, ‘D’ explains the significant place occupied by patriotism in the development of a strong and dynamic economy. ‘E’ and ‘F’ recount the stories of patriotism displayed by the youth in ensuring a free and fair election, while ‘H’, ‘I’ and ‘J’ are expressions of gratitude to patriotic Nigerians generally for their different roles in the scheme of things.

One of the aims of Goodluck Jonathan in his speeches is to sell his integrity to the populace and reinforce his acceptance as a trustworthy, reliable and honest president, whom the people can count on. That is why the word transparency keeps on featuring in his speeches. It is discovered that any time he mentions the word; he is either talking about the economy or the elections. He, perhaps, realises that those two aspects of national endeavours occupy positions in people’s hearts and it is only by being transparent that the two key sectors can develop. Examples:

*Fellow Nigerians, one of the cardinal commitments of this administration is our commitment to Good Governance, Accountability and Transparency. (A)*

*I call on you to join me to work together in harmony and synergy to forge a nation where we understand our differences instead of pretending they do not exist and work towards a perfect union founded on transparency, equity and justice. (B)*

*In the management of the economy, I advocated a more transparent banking industry, price stability, low inflation, and aggregate increase in productivity as a way to drive us to a more prosperous economy. (C)*

*Unfortunately, despite the free, fair and transparent manner the elections were conducted, a senseless wave of violence in some parts of the country led to the death of ten members of the NYSC and others. (E)*  
*In its latest report, Transparency International (TI) noted that Nigeria is the second most improved country in the effort to curb corruption. (F)*

*We have gone to great length to ensure transparent, free, fair and credible elections. (I)*

*We have established a legacy of democratic freedom, transparency, economic growth and free and fair elections. (J)*

In those sampled sentences from the speeches, there is a lexical reiteration of the word transparency or transparent in seven speeches out of ten. His first speech is found to have set the pace for transparent governance and all through; he keeps on reiterating and hammering on it up to the last, where as a matter of self-assessment, he confirms that he has established a legacy of transparency. In addition, the word transparency or transparent as the case may be has specifically selected definite and lexically relevant chains of collocates to reinforce this emphasis. For example, Good Governance, Accountability (A), equity and justice (B), free, fair (E), free, fair and credible (I), and free and fair (J) are family words to stylishly indicate his strong integrity.

Considering the explicated themes in Goodluck Jonathan's selected speeches, apart from the last two themes, patriotism and transparency, it is noted that in the first four themes, he deliberately deploys lexical items in the speeches to reverberate the National Motto which is unity and faith, peace and progress. This has been the Motto of Nigeria since 1978 after it was changed from peace, unity and freedom. Goodluck Jonathan, by this, stylishly portrays himself as someone who will not deviate from the ideology of the nation, but who, come what may, will uphold the national ethics and principles. At the same time, he is trying to emphasize the importance of the Motto to national development and growth. By emphasizing the lexical items through reiteration, Goodluck Jonathan, in a sense, reinforces people's attention to those lexical items in the speeches. While it may not be possible for the audience to take note of all the words he used, the repeated words are more easily noticed, thus pointing their attention to the relationship which exists between the repeated words and the subject matter of his speeches.

## 6. Conclusion

The illustrated examples of reiteration, the repetition of words like unity, faith, peace, progress, patriotism and transparency or words which imply them, no doubt, signal Goodluck Jonathan's emphasis on the

themes of his speeches. The excerpts which contain the reiterated items cut across most of the ten speeches sampled. The implication of this is that there is a stronger connectivity of these speeches since each of the speeches has a semantic 'contact point' with one another in the repeated keywords.

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